

# **Ubuntu/Botho Culture - A Path to Improved Performance and Socio-Economic Development in Post-apartheid SA: Beyond Rhetoric.**

**By**


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## DECLARATION

I, Mokong Simon Mapadimeng, hereby declare that this thesis is my own work. Any other work done by other persons has been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted in the Programme of the Industrial, Organizational and Labour Studies (IOLS) in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, Durban, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Signed



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## List of Tables

<b>Table</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Pages</b>
Table 1	Age distribution of interviewed production workers	169
Table 2	Racial composition of interviewed production workers	169
Table 3	. Employment tenure of interviewed production workers	169
Table 4	Workers' Perception of Relations with Line Management	184
Table 5	Workers' Knowledge of the Sebenza /BEP Project	197
Table 6	Workers' Perceptions of the PEC's Caring Values at Cranco Metals	200

## **Abbreviations**

ACPB – African Corporate Petty Bourgeoisie

AIDS – Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome

ANC – African National Congress

APP – African Personnel Practitioners

AU – African Union

BEP - Business Enhancement Project

BMF – Black Management Forum

BTR – British Tyre and Rubber Company

CODESRIA - Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa

COSAS – Congress of South African Students

COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions

FDI – Foreign Direct Investments

FOSATU – Federation of South African Trade Unions

GEAR – Growth, Employment and Redistribution

HIV – Human Immuno Virus

ICA – Industrial Conciliation Act

IFP – Inkatha Freedom Party

ILO – International Labour Organisation

ISCOR – Industrial and Steel Corporation

LSI – Less Serious Injuries

NAD – Native Affairs Department

NEPAD - New Partnership for Africa's Development

MAWU - Metal and Allied Workers Union

MWU – Mine Workers Union

NUM – National Union of Mineworkers

NUMSA – National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa

OASSSA – Organisation for Appropriate Social Services in South Africa

OAU - Organisation of African Unity

PAC – Pan Africanist Congress

PBT – Profit Before Tax

PEC – Performance Enhancement Culture

RDP –Reconstruction and Development Programme

ROI – Return on Investment

SADC - South African Development Community

SA – South Africa

SACP – South African communist Party

SALFS – South African Labour Flexibility Survey

SANNC – South African Native National Congress

SASO – South African Students Association

UASA – United Association of South Africa

# Abstract

While the debate on the indigenous culture of ubuntu/botho in South Africa (SA) goes far back into the history as signified by Ngubane(1963 and 1979)'s works on the role of the ubuntu values in the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle; in the last two decades or so, this debate has gathered even much greater momentum. This recent interest in ubuntu/botho culture could be attributed to the imminence of the collapse of apartheid in the late 1980s and the turn of the 1990s, and also the post-apartheid situation in which the SA society came to confront serious socio-economic and political challenges. Those challenges arose from the country's re-admission into the global world, which presented challenges associated with globalisation phenomenon such as the need to achieve economic competitiveness. They also were presented by the newly attained democratic dispensation along which dawned the urgent need to redress the apartheid-created injustices and to work earnestly towards the eradication of the past legacies such as racial inequalities and poverty while seeking to consolidate and jealously defend the still rather fragile democracy. Event much more recently, the debate came to form part of the current continent-wide sentiment that Africa should claim the twenty-first century and that all efforts should be channelled towards the renewal of Africa following the destructions and distortions caused by colonialism.

Central to this debate in SA is the widely held belief and claim that the ubuntu/botho cultural values could be mobilised into developmental and transformative force. In particular, a strong claim is made that for SA to achieve competitive advantage in global markets, its development strategies should tap into the values of the ubuntu/botho culture. While few cases are cited as success stories indicative of ubuntu values' positive influence on business management strategies in the workplace, often with the assistance of private consultants, these remain isolated and no any serious follow-up studies were conducted in order to assess the sustainability of such interventions. Thus, what is essentially missing in this debate, is a comprehensive in-depth, empirically-based study aimed at not only assessing the validity of these widely held claims, but also at examining the objective conditions under which the ubuntu/botho cultural values can help in realising this role. Also critical and missing

is the need to possibilities/opportunities and potential constraints to ubuntu/botho culture's ability to fulfil this role. Often these debates lack any serious theoretical basis or comparative references on which to justify their claims. Further, there is seldom any attempt to locate the debate on ubuntu/botho culture in the wider context of the debate and research in the African continent around questions of traditional cultures, thought systems and development and progress. While the present study approaches this debate in such a way that the gaps highlighted addressed through extensive review of literature, it however takes it even further by giving it an empirical content through an in-depth case study of one South African workplace as an illustrative example. This empirically-based approach, coupled with extensive and critical review of the relevant literature, helped to take the debate on ubuntu/botho culture *beyond rhetoric* which characterises the current dominant thinking within the debate. I argue, on the basis of my overall findings that while evidence gathered supports the case for the need to explore with the ubuntu/botho culture in the economic and business sphere, and in particular at the workplace level, some serious obstacles would and do stand in the way of realising the potentially transformative and developmental role of the culture's values.

	<b>Table of Contents</b>	
<b>Chapters</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Pages</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	Introduction	<b>1 – 8</b>
<b>PART ONE</b>		
<b>Chapter One</b>	Culture, Economy and Development: A Theoretical Analysis.	<b>9 – 38</b>
<b>Chapter Two</b>	Culture and Economic Development: A Review of the East Asian Experiences.	<b>39 – 66</b>
<b>Chapter Three</b>	Perspectives on African Traditional Cultures and Value Systems: Are they Relevant to Progress and Development? Implications for Ubuntu/Botho Culture in South Africa.	<b>67 – 67</b>
	3.1. Introduction	<b>68 – 69</b>
	3.2. Review of Literature and Debates	<b>69 – 85</b>
	3.3. Concluding Remarks	<b>85 – 88</b>
<b>PART TWO</b>		
<b>Chapter Four</b>	On Ubuntu/Botho Culture and Economic Development in South Africa – A Review of Debates	<b>89 – 89</b>
	4.1. Introduction	<b>90 – 90</b>
	4.2. Literature Review of Debates on Ubuntu/Botho Culture and Development in Contemporary South Africa	
	4.2.1. Ubuntu or Botho Culture – What is it and what does it Entail?	<b>90 - 99</b>



	4.2.2. Ubuntu/Botho Culture and Development in South Africa: A Focus on Work and Performance in the Workplace.	<b>99 – 141</b>
	4.3. Concerns, Potential Constraints and Opportunities to Ubuntu/Botho in the workplace – What Can Be Done?	<b>141 - 157</b>
	4.4. Concluding Remarks	<b>158 – 165</b>
<b>Chapter Five</b>	Workplace Culture, Participation and Work Performance in South Africa (SA): Implications for the role of Ubuntu/Botho Culture - A Case Study of Cranco Metals Ltd	<b>166 – 166</b>
	5.1. Background to Cranco Metals and Workforce Profile.	<b>167 – 172</b>
	5.2. Cranco Metals' Organisational Culture: The Performance Enhancement Culture (PEC)	<b>173 – 182</b>
	5.3. Workers' Attitudes, Perceptions and Reaction to PEC and the Impact on Performance	<b>182 – 207</b>
<b>Chapter Six</b>	Discussion and Analysis of Findings and Implications for Ubuntu/Botho in the Workplace	<b>208- 208</b>
	6.1. Analysis of the Findings	<b>209 – 212</b>
	6.2. Implications for Ubuntu/Botho at Cranco Metals	<b>212 – 217</b>
	6.3. Concluding Remarks	<b>217 - 219</b>
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	A Critical Discussion, Review and Analysis of the Overall Findings	<b>220 - 220</b>
	7.1. Culture and Economy: the link between them	<b>221 – 223</b>
	7.2. The Case for Economic Role and Relevance of the Ubuntu/Botho Culture	<b>223 – 226</b>

	7.3. The South African Workplace, Cranco Metals and Ubuntu/Botho Culture	<b>226 - 226</b>
	7.3.1. Opportunities for Ubuntu/Botho Culture in the Workplace	<b>226 - 233</b>
	7.3.2. Potential Constraints to Ubuntu/Botho Culture in the Workplace	<b>233 – 238</b>
	7.4. What can be done? Proposed Measures to Overcome Constraints	<b>239 – 242</b>
<b>Chapter Eight</b>	Conclusions and Recommendations	<b>243-243</b>
	8.1. Summary of Conclusions (8.1.1 to 8.1.7.)	<b>244-248</b>
	8.2.General, Policy and Further Research Recommendations (8.2.1. – 8.2.5.)	<b>249- 251</b>
	References	<b>252- 265</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Methodology and Methods Used	<b>266 – 272</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Questionnaire Guiding Interviews with Production Workers.	<b>273 - 276</b>
<b>Appendices 3 and 4</b>	Questions Guiding Semi-Structured Interviews with Senior Management	<b>277 - 278</b>
<b>Appendix 5</b>	Dates and Times of Interviews Conducted at Cranco Metals in October - December, 2003	<b>279 – 280</b>

# Introduction

One of the dominant themes in contemporary academic/intellectual and managerial discourses is that of the link/s between the economic and socio-cultural dimensions of life, which has led to what came to be considered as the culture-economy debate. Central to this debate, and as deducible from Ray and Sayer (1999)'s co-edited text *Culture and Economy after the Cultural Turn*, are attempts to understand the nature of the relationship between these two concepts and phenomena, how they influence each other, and the factors that determine the nature of the influence and the relationship itself. For instance, whether or not cultural values help to enhance or inhibit economic activities; or whether or not the distinction between culture and economy is tenable. Arguing that there has been, within the social sciences at the end of the twentieth century, what they term the "cultural turn" signified by growth of interest in culture and a turn away from economy, Ray and Sayer (1999) argue that their text contains some of the responses, informed by curiosity to understand this cultural turn and the changing nature of relationship between culture and economy. Hence that the central aim of the text is to explore the dialectic of culture and economy with the view to providing insights on the connections or lack of between the cultural turn in social sciences and outside (see Ray and Sayer, 1999: 2).

In their introductory chapter, Ray and Sayer offer what they consider to be some contribution to the debate around culture and economy and the idea of the cultural turn. They argue that although economic activities are culturally inflected or embedded as they cannot be conducted independently of systems of meanings and norms, culture and economy are no synonyms as there are crucial differences between them. They thus dispute assertions held by some analysts and theorists that the distinctions between culture and economy have been collapsed and are therefore no longer tenable. Hence that notwithstanding the culturally embedded nature of economic activities, the distinction between culture and economy remains essential. To illustrate this point, they cite the rise of the culturally inflected service economy which has been seen as part of the post-industrial order with dominance over the traditional material production or manufacturing economy. This view, they argue, is not clear since what is referred to as service production such as catering contains strong elements of manufacture, and that where strong cultural element exists such as in true services like teaching and counselling, there is still pursuit for economic reward and economic constraints are also at play (see Ray and Sayer, 1999: 4-8).

To illustrate the cultural embeddedness of economy, they refer to the analysis by Nancy Fraser, one of the contributors in their edited text, of the relationship between what are termed the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution which feature strongly in the culture-economy debate. Fraser, they argue, dismissed the dichotomy drawn between these two types of politics. In this dichotomy, proponents of the politics of recognition are seen as neglecting the question of egalitarian redistribution while simultaneously falsely universalising dominant groups' norms at the expense of other norms. On the other hand, those advocating the politics of redistribution are said to be considering identity politics as diverting attention on the real economic issues making it easy for the powerless to be divided and ruled. In dismissing these dichotomous tendencies, Fraser argues that both types of politics cut across all social movements and that, rather than being seen as referring to two separate substantive societal domains (i.e. economy and culture), they should be treated as two analytical perspectives that can be applied to any domain which would expose the complex imbrication of economy and culture (see Ray and Sayer, 1990: 12).

This complex imbrication is increasingly being acknowledged by many other authors today. For instance, making a comparative reference to experiences in both the United states of America and South Africa, Cock and Bernstein (1998) caution against the danger of what they see as the tendency of presenting 'difference' or diversity to displace the concerns with inequality and disadvantage. Based on the understanding that diversity is an amorphous concept which, if not adequately contextualized in specific social and historical circumstances would see its preaching being manipulated to legitimize the existing unjust order while stripping it of its transformative potential, Cock and Bernstein call for a materialist account that should seek to strike a balance between concerns with both difference/diversity and disadvantage/inequality. Hence their argument for a synthesis where there would be a fusion of two historically different political traditions i.e. the older tradition that focused on class struggles around economic conditions and inequality, and the newer tradition that focused on difference and diversity and struggles for cultural justice (Cock and Bernstein, 1998: 2). This argument is informed by their understanding of social transformation as involving not only redistribution of political power and resources but also recognition, revaluing and affirmation of the historically marginalized or stigmatized identities.

Drawing from this perspective, Ray and Sayer, although in disagreement with Stuart Hall (1988)'s claim that the distinction between culture and economy are useless, they however support his view that culture is not a "decorative addendum to the hard world of production and things, the icing on the cake of the material world" (Ray and Sayer, 1999: 9).

It is probably the acknowledgement of this convoluted relationship between culture and economy that has seen the culture turn not only in academia but also in the managerial discourse. This cultural turn in the managerial and or business discourse, Nigel Thrift (1999) argues, is signified by the rise of 'soft' or 'knowledgeable' capitalism, in which the business community has grown to appreciate importance of knowledge and information in the economic. This soft capitalism and the attendant new managerial discourse, Thrift argues, are dependent on the new metaphors that are based on the notions of 'constant adaptation' to the 'more turbulent, uncertain and insecure world' and the need to engage 'the hearts and minds of the workforce'. Hence, that the metaphors are centred around concern with ensuring that organisational forms are more looser and agile and thus able to 'go with the flow' open to the rather complex and ambiguous world as well as produce subjects who can fit those organisational forms (Thrift, 1999: 142-143 drawing from du Gay, 1996). Amongst the main transmitters of this new managerial discourse across the globe are, according to Thrift, the management gurus, business schools and management consultancies whom he collectively calls the 'cultural circuit of capital'.

According to Thompson and Findlay (1999), this kind of managerial discourse is not a new phenomenon but has a long history. While in the USA, it took the form of the "welfare work" programmes in the 1920s through which attempts were made "to engender integration and loyalty through non-job benefits, company unions and workplace social communities" as part of a move towards a "welfare capitalist model"; in Britain it manifested itself through what they call "corporate paternalism", mainly in small-scale family firms and socially conscious businesses such as Lever Brothers, and through which work and community life were interwoven. Corporate paternalism, which in later inter-war years was expanded beyond the small-scale family firms and traditional forms of authority, and the welfare work programmes or the "workplace social engineering" programmes in the USA, they argue, constituted

nothing less than cultural strategies which sought to appeal to employees' hearts and minds. Hence, that in their implementation, they saw the 'cultural' being combined with bureaucratic and technical controls in forms of scientific management. While the immediate post-1945 period saw the consolidation of these programmes and corporate paternalism ensuring that large firms are embedded in their localities and family networks enjoying continual labour supply, Thompson and Findlay (1999: 171) argue, the 1960s witnessed a crisis in corporate paternalism due to long term social and economic changes that led to firms growing in complexity and in scale, disrupting the inter-relations between work, family and community as well as traditional forms of management and co-ordination. The complexity and large-scale nature of the firms was attributable mainly to the processes of restructuring and rationalisation marked by moves towards "hard systems and formalistic, procedural processes in the organisation of the labour process, industrial relations and decision making"(See Thompson and Findlay,1999: 171). Thompson and Findlay (1999) argue that what is considered the cultural turn in the 1980s, is in fact a cultural *return* to familiar themes in new language, driven mainly by best practices in Japan and US high-tech firms, but also the need to "repair the costs of a shift towards more explicitly calculative and instrumental relationships".

Perhaps the East and South East Asian economic systems provide a powerful representation of this typology of capitalism i.e. the soft capitalism and the cultural turn/return as well as their attendant managerial discourse. This should be so as the economic life in this part of the world is said to have been largely intertwined with the unique cultural value system of Confucianism, which in turn is said to have had a positive impact on the economy and its development.

In Africa, this global trend towards this discourse, both in the academia and business/in the economic, is represented by calls led by African scholars and political leaders for renewal of Africa in the post-colonial, post-apartheid and globalisation era (see for instance Makgoba et al, 1999; Gyeke, 1997; and Senghor, 1996). At the centre of these calls is the emphasis laid on the need to revive indigenous African knowledge and value systems. This is within the project of African renaissance spearheaded by the South African President, Thabo Mbeki. In South Africa, there has recently been an upsurge of research and debate in which strong claims are being



made that the indigenous knowledge systems, including the African culture of Ubuntu/Botho, should be harnessed as a force for the socio-economic development of the post-apartheid SA society. This, it was argued, would be instrumental not only in helping with the project of reconstruction and development but also in giving SA competitive advantage at the global level (see for instance Mbigi and Maree, 1995; Lessem, 1996; Lessem and Nussbaum, 1996; Teffo, 1999).

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to explore, through in-depth research and analysis, the strength and validity of these claims and assertions that the harnessing of the indigenous cultural values of ubuntu/botho could have a positive influence on performance socio-economic development of the post-apartheid, democratic South Africa in this era of globalisation. This will be done through a focus on the workplace as the place in which the most productive socio-economic activities happen whereby specific attention will be paid to the role of the ubuntu/botho culture in the enhancement of production or working relations, workplace practices and work performance, and the likely impact this could have on the wider economy.

Towards this, the thesis has been structured into two main parts. Part one is comprised of chapters 1, 2 and 3 and part two is comprised of chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. Part one starts with chapter 1 which provides an outline of theoretical perspectives on the relationships between culture and economy in order to establish not only understanding the nature of this relationship, but also the role, if any, that culture has in the socio-economic life of the society. It thus constitutes the key theoretical framework for the study and relies heavily on the use of secondary sources, which are abundantly available since the subject has been extensively researched. The main approach here has been the critical review and analysis of secondary literature on the subject whereby a wide range of classical and contemporary theoretical perspectives.

Chapter 2, also based on the review of secondary literature, with some of the literature being purely theoretical and the other being empirical and case study-based findings on actual experiences in the Asian economies(both in the South East Asian and East Asian regions), and in particular the East Asian experiences, builds on the preceding chapter. This it does by seeking to test the validity of theoretical dispositions and observations on culture and its role and relevance or lack thereof to socio-economic



change and development. The key question here is whether or not evidence exists from the East Asian experiences that show the influence of societal culture on the economy and in the workplace. If such evidence exists, what kind of influence does culture have? Is it positive and enhancing or negative and inhibitive? Specific attention is paid to the culture Confucianism in the East Asian region. Thus the main concern in looking at Confucianism is to examine whether or not the experiences and research findings on it (i.e. Confucianism) and its role in the East Asian economies challenge or support the theoretical perspectives on culture, economy, change and development.

Chapter 3 seeks to locate the subsequent analysis of economic and developmental role of the indigenous African culture of ubuntu within the broader context of perspectives on the continent's (i.e. Africa's) indigenous cultures and thought systems and their relevance or lack thereof to socio-economic, technological and scientific progress and development. It does this, like with the preceding chapters, through the use of secondary sources, both theory and empirical case study based. Various perspectives on African cultures, traditional practices and thought systems receive attention and the implications for ubuntu or botho culture's economic and developmental relevance, as an African value system, are examined and highlighted.

Part two constitutes what should be considered the core of the entire study as it is within it that a shift is made towards a focus on the central concern of the study i.e. a critical analysis and assessment of the role that the indigenous African cultural values of ubuntu/botho has or could play in South Africa's socio-economic development and transformation, with a particular attention drawn to work performance within the workplace. In chapter 4, I make use of a combination of methods<sup>1</sup> to provide a critical review of debates and perspectives on the ubuntu culture and its socio-economic role and significance. These methods include reference to secondary literature in the form of books, research articles and conference/workshop/symposium papers; internet-based sources; and also personal observations, experiences and insights on indigenous African cultural practices, values and beliefs within the present-day South African society and communities. The main argument developed from the reviews in this

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed discussion of the benefits and advantages of using this kind of methodological approach, refer to Appendix one.

chapter is that while there is strong evidence that supports the claims that ubuntu/botho culture does have relevance and a role to play in SA's development and transformation, and particularly in workplace work performance, there are however some serious challenges and potential constraints that, if not addressed, could prove inhibitive to such role.

Chapters 5 and 6 are case-study based and build on chapter four by examining a corporate, organisational, and/or workplace culture within the workplace of one of SA's corporate organisations or factories, as an illustrative example. The selected case study for the thesis is the Cranco Metals Ltd<sup>2</sup>. This examination is meant to identify the nature of this workplace culture, its defining values and principles, what it aims to achieve and the extent to which it has achieved the set objectives. This is done to determine whether or not the findings support or challenge the case for or against ubuntu/botho culture in the workplace, and the likely impact this would have on working or production relations as well as on performance. Given the nature of the study's key aim and objective as already outlined, any workplace and/or work environment in any of the economic sectors could have been chosen for case study. Thus the Cranco Metals Ltd was not chosen for any particular special features and qualities, except that it is a typical South African (-based) company.

The chapter 7 provides a critical discussion, review and analysis of the main findings arising from all the preceding chapters. Here I would put forward by arguments based on the above analysis, pointing out to areas which I believe require further research and analysis as well as proposing measures needed to address the challenges and constraints identified. All of these would be summed up in chapter 8 whereby key conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to appendix 1 for more on this case study as well as for methods and methodological approaches used.

# **PART ONE**

## **Chapter One**

### **Culture, Economy and Development: A Theoretical Analysis.**

For centuries, the question of the relationship between culture and economy and the role that the former has in the economic life of society has been a subject of intense intellectual and sociological inquiry and debate. It received attention from earlier sociological thinkers and other cultural theorists as well as from later generations of thinkers, and to this day continues to receive greater attention, especially in the contemporary era where intensifying globalisation processes have brought to light questions such as cultural diversity. This chapter provides a critical review of the various theoretical contributions to the subject of culture-economy with a view to establishing the nature of the relationship between them and implications for the role of the ubuntu/botho culture in the socio-economic development of the post-apartheid, democratic South Africa.

In our attempt to examine and understand the nature of the relationship between cultural and economic spheres of life, it would be a tragic mistake not to consider the earlier contributors to this debate and how they continue to influence our thinking around this question today. Amongst these earlier contributors is Karl Marx, whose works have ignited intense debate which has led to numerous reviews and new creative thoughts on culture-economy. Marx's ideas on the subject of the relationship between culture and economy lie mainly in his materialist conception of social change and history, also known as the base-superstructure thesis, whose main focus is on how social production is organised (Fine, 1989). This conception or thesis and its account of social change in society is best explained by Marx's life-long partner, Frederick Engels as quoted below:

“The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production (of the means to support human life) and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into internal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the *philosophy* but in the *economics* of each particular epoch. The growing perception that existing social institutions are unreasonable and unjust, that reason has become unreason, and right wrong, is only proof that in the modes of production and exchange changes have silently taken place with which the

social order, adapted to earlier economic conditions, is no longer in keeping. From this it also follows that the means of getting rid of the incongruities that have been brought to light must also be present, in a more or less developed condition, within the changed modes of production themselves. These means are not to be *invented*, spun out of the head, but *discovered* with the aid of the head in the existing material facts of production.” (Engels, 1975: 317).

This thesis was developed as a reaction and a critique of preceding non-materialist accounts which, in explaining change in society, underplayed the significance and role of economic forces. Leading such non-materialist accounts was Hegel with his dialectic and idealistic thesis which asserts that society is best understood through human consciousness and that the source of change in the society lies in ideas. As Fine puts it, for Hegelians, “Just as science leads to the development of technology, so intellectual progress is the basis for the advance of government, culture and the other forms of social life. ... History was a dramatic stage on which institutions and ideas battled for hegemony...Each stage of development contained the seeds of transformation to a higher stage...Each stage was an advance on those that preceded it, but it absorbed elements from them” (Fine, 1989: 2). In fact, according to Fine, Marx not only challenged the Hegelian perspective (while at some stage he identified with one of its strands), but also Feuerbach’s materialist theory which asserted that rather than human consciousness having a determinant influence on life, it is in fact human needs that shape human consciousness. Hence that belief in God and religion helps humans to meet their material, emotional needs (Fine, 1989: 3).

However, despite Marx’s earlier positive impression of Feuerbach’s theory, he later became critical of its failure to provide insight into the context of the origin of those human needs. Contrary to Feuerbach, Marx argued that the relationship between human or social being and human consciousness/thought is characterised by dominance of the former over the latter i.e. social being determines human consciousness. Marx’s understanding of social being is best captured in his *Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* in which he argued:

“In the social production of their life, people enter into particular, necessary relations independently of their will, relations of production which correspond to a particular stage of

development of their material productive forces. These productive relations as a whole form economic structure, the real base upon which a legal and political superstructure rises and to which particular forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and mental life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social being but ... their social being that determines their consciousness.” (Jakubowski, 1990: 30 and Williams, 2002: 56)

Marx also used this materialist approach to explain the crisis of the capitalist system that led to the emergence of the working class as an organised force, which in his view, would eventually undermine the very system of capitalism itself. Note here his argument in the Communist Manifesto:

“... with the development of modern industry the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level. The growing competitions among the bourgeois and the resulting commercial crises make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The unceasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon the workers begin to form combinations (trade unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision before-hand for these occasional revolts. Here and there the contest breaks out into riots. Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralize the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarians, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years. This organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself ... The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-

diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.” (Marx, 1973: 75, 76, and 79)

However, notwithstanding this rather strong materialist theory of society, history and change, later reviews have shown that while Marx has strongly advanced a materialist analysis, his theory is not narrowly deterministic. Swingewood (1998) argues, for instance, that in his analysis, Marx never underrated the importance of the idea elements within the superstructure, and thus that he (Marx) acknowledged that the relationship between the economic base and cultural superstructure is dialectical and reciprocal in nature, rather than one having dominance over the other. Similarly, Jakubowski (1990: 58-59) argues that although for Marx both thought and/or human consciousness and being are distinct from each other, they are however dialectically united with human consciousness serving as an active influential factor of historical change. This dialectical relationship has been ignored by those he calls vulgar Marxists. Jakubowski (1990) thus cautions that while economic relations/economic structure/base predominate in all instances, for a comprehensive understanding of social being and consciousness to be developed it is imperative that the whole range of other factors are taken into account. To quote:

“... in any analysis of an individual situation it is social being as a whole that has to be taken into account – the economic and political relations certainly, but also the existing social ideologies and the intellectual tradition. These latter superstructural forces do not act independently of the other factors. They are themselves the expressions of certain material relations of production ... When we want to account for the consciousness of a particular human group it is by no means enough to classify them simply in economic terms or to determine their class identity, even if this is where the most important objective (rather than subjective) roots of their actions lie. A precise account must take account of all the concrete factors of their social being. What is important is not just the question of which class they belong to but also (for example) the particular layer or role which they occupy within that class, the social position of the family ... ,and above all, the ideological traditions of the group ... Vulgar Marxists of all political tendencies usually neglect these wide-ranging factors of social being... while the vulgar Marxist politicians in Germany wait for the petty bourgeoisie to develop a proletarian class consciousness and become socialists, these layer turn in a mass towards national socialism - a clear indication that ‘social being’ does not simply mean ‘economic situation’. Religion, upbringing, the cultural tradition, political prejudices received in the family environment: all these are social factors, whose importance is no less than that of the economic base.” (Jakubowski , 1990: 59)



A similar analysis of Marx's theory is provided by Swingewood (1998) who argues that although Marx placed great emphasis on the primacy of the base over the superstructure, within his and Engels' theoretical analysis of culture lies a subtle, flexible, bold dialectical model. This, Swingewood argues, could be seen in Marx's analysis of practical situations within specific historical contexts whereby he acknowledged the active role that ideas and culture played within the economic and political structure. This was particularly so with the case of the revolutionary crisis in France during 1848 whereby Marx noted a complex balance of forces at play within the economic and political structures and the differentiation and plurality of social classes. Marx thus noted in what has been proclaimed as one of his most brilliant assertions:

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seemed engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis, they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their services and borrow from them names, battles cries and costume in order to present the new scheme of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language." (Marx, 1851 in McLellan, 1977: 300; also see Swingewood, 1998: 2)

A similar non-materialist dialectic element within Marx's theory can be seen from his explanation of the development of bourgeois capitalism in both France and England and the revolutionary spirit it triggered amongst the impoverished masses:

"But unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless took heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war, and battles of peoples to bring it into being. And in the classically austere traditions of the Roman republic its gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations on the content of their struggles and to keep their enthusiasm on the high plane of the great historical tragedy. Similarly, at another stage of development a century earlier, Cromwell and the English people had borrowed speech, passions, and illusions from the Old Testament for their bourgeois revolution...Thus the awakening of the dead in those revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in imagination, not of fleeing from its ghost walk about again." (Marx, 1851 in McLellan, 1977, 1977: 301)



Engels also employs dialectic, non-materialist account acknowledging the importance of humans as agents of change in his analysis of the crisis of the capitalist order. He observes:

“With the seizing of the means of production by society, production of commodities is done away with, and, simultaneously, the mastery of the product over the producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by plan-conforming, conscious organization. The struggle for individual existence disappears. Then for the first time man, in a certain sense, is finally marked off from the rest of the animal kingdom, and emerges from mere animal conditions of existence into really human ones. The whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which have hitherto ruled man, now comes under the dominion and control of man, who for the first time becomes the real, conscious lord of nature, because he has now become master of his own social organization. The laws of his own social action, hitherto standing face to face with man as laws of nature foreign to, and dominating him, will then be used with full understanding, and so mastered by him. Man’s own social organization, hitherto confronting him as necessity imposed by nature and history, now becomes the result of his own free action. The extraneous objective forces that have hitherto governed history pass under the control of man himself. Only from that time will man himself, with full consciousness, make his own history – only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him. It is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.” (Engels, 1975: 335-336)

Williams (2002) too shows the dialectic nature of Marx’s theory by pointing to his (Marx’s) criticism of what he viewed as tendencies by some to impose abstract separation of “areas of thought and activity” (i.e. separation of consciousness from material production). Arguing that Marx “was at once specific and flexible in his use of own terms”, Williams cites Marx’s 1857 observation of arts (the latter constituting part of the superstructure):

“As regards arts, it is well known that some of its peaks by no means correspond to the general development of society; nor do they therefore to the material substructure, the skeleton as it were of its organisation” (see Williams, 2002: 58).

To further illustrate this point about the complex nature of relationships between the base and the superstructure, he also quotes from Engels:

“Still higher ideologies, that is, such as are still further removed from the material, economic basis, take the form of philosophy and religion. Hence the interconnection between conceptions and their material conditions of existence becomes more and more complicated, more and more obscured by intermediate links. But the interconnection exists. According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure – political forms of the class struggle and its results ... judicial forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogma – also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents ..., the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary. Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree.” (See Williams, 2002: 58-59)

Notwithstanding this flexible, dialectical thesis which recognises the equally significant and influential role of the superstructural elements within Marxist theory, Marx however failed to adequately address and theoretically engage with problems associated with those superstructural elements such as culture and their autonomy from the economic base. Like Marx, Engels also failed to explain the persistence of some cultural forms in widely differing societies and historical times and even where the mode of production on which they were dependent has disappeared. This, Swingewood argues, remained so in spite of the evident absence of direct links between the French Enlightenment’s radical and critical philosophy and its largely agrarian, pre-modern economic system as well as the absence of any clear links between Ibsen’s modern theatre and its economic undevelopment. This led to this inference by Swingewood:

“...the problem of linkages remains: Marx and Engels formulated a social theory which focussed on the interaction taking place between base and superstructure, while neglecting to specify the ways in which different contents, constituting base and superstructure, actually

work. Their comments on the relation of Greek art to modern industrialism, Ibsen (theatre) to the Norwegian economy and Enlightenment philosophy to French economic underdevelopment, serve only to cloud the analytical issues involved and to reinforce the view that the broad trend of a Marxist theory of culture is reductionist..." (Swingewood, 1998: 4-5)

Marx's reaction to non-materialist social theorists who tended to downplay the role of economic forces in the societal development and change, which led to him placing more emphasis on economic forces than on superstructural forces; and his and Engels' failure to examine the inner workings of the superstructure, blinded the later generations of Marxists who presented Marxism as a functionalist, reductionist theory (Swingewood, 1998). Hence:

"In the historical development of Marxism, Marx's caveats on the internal complexity and pluralism within advanced social formations were largely ignored. The mechanical base-superstructure model, with its emphasis on direct links between material and cultural production, dominant class and dominant ideas, was reinforced." (Swingewood, 1998: 8)

Thus, for those Marxists, culture formulates part of the superstructure which is subordinate to the base i.e. material economic conditions and forces. Culture and its forms are seen as simply a reflection and expression of socio-economic interests of the dominant classes, as well as instrumental to the production and reproduction of the conditions under which those interests are advanced and sustained. In terms of this understanding culture is not isolated from the material life processes of society but imbricated in their structures. Hence that culture serves not only as a realm of values and meanings but also of ideology which serves to legitimise the capitalist institutions and structures (which in turn are used to spread that ideology) in order to achieve social stability, cohesion and integration (Swingewood, 1998: 6-7).

This misreading of Marx's theory by classical Marxists, Swingewood argues, continued to blind even contemporary Marxists writers such as art historians Antal (1986) and Hauser (1963) who argue that cultural products are a reflection of both individuals' psychic dispositions or consciousness and the dominant socio-economic class interests and ideology. These historians maintained this view inspite of their dismissal of the idea that there is a single dominant ideology and their acknowledgment of the existence of pluralism in societies. This adherence to

functionalist determinism and reductionism can be seen from the example given by Antal that art works commissioned by the wealthy reflect their identity and ideology. Hence artists, as cultural agents, are seen as “passive midwives” (Swingewood 1998: 11). The persistence of this narrow deterministic functionalist base-superstructure model in contemporary times is further evidenced in, for instance, Jameson (1984)’s account of the artistic post-modernism:

“...we have entered a phase of late capitalism characterized by the circulation of signs and symbols and global information flows. The hedonistic consumption of images is central to this stage of capitalism. Postmodernism reflects the new image-based economy in that it is the ‘cultural logic of late capitalism.’ It also operates in ideological ways to prevent people from connecting with their history and collective identity. It generates confusion and celebrates the superficial.” (quoted in Smith, 2001: 224).

Further evidence can be seen in Harvey (1989)’s argument that capital-driven post-modern trends spill over into the wider cultural life determining its broad contours. According to Harvey:

“We live in a world where the media, fads, fashions, and images are increasingly important. The result is a culture characterized by superficiality in which products relentlessly replace each other and where the pursuit of empty style has replaced the search for authenticity, history, and narrative.” (see Smith, 2001: 224).

Similarly, dependency and neo-Marxist theorists today provide a deterministic functionalist account, using the concept of “cultural imperialism”, of the role that culture has played in the expansion of global capitalist system. Central to this account is the view held by theorists such as Herbert Schiller, Flora and Flora, and Salinas and Paldan that communication and media technologies are used as capitalist agencies to spread the modern capitalist system and its culture. Particular reference here was made to a culture of consumerism as a product exported to developing and underdeveloped Third world societies through cultural imperialism. This argument is clearly evident in Tomlinson’s observation and analysis of these neo-Marxist perspectives:

“There is a sense here of cultural imperialism as being simply in the service of the capitalist system. The suggestion is that the ‘good life’ of capitalist consumerism is displayed as a lure to the powerful in the developing countries to get them to the hook of the capitalist world system ....” (Tomlinson, 1991: 103-104)

In terms of this perspective, culture serves as an ideological tool of capitalism. This is premised on the understanding of cultural imperialism advanced by Shiller (1976) as being “the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system.” (Tomlinson, 1991:103)

The consequential impact of cultural imperialism on the underdeveloped Third world societies, as understood by the neo-Marxists and dependency theorists, is two-fold. First is the argument that it gives rise to ‘dependent development’ that creates class divisions in developing societies, resulting in the subordination of their (i.e. Third world countries') cultures. It is referred to as “dependent development” as it is enhanced by the interdependence between exogenous and endogenous processes characterised, respectively, by the external domination by developed nations of the West through the multinational corporations and the internal dominant classes. Hence, the argument that the dependent structure of Third world economies divides the class structure into two sectors. One sector being economically tied to the ‘modernising’ industrial sector dominated by multinationals (hence the endogenous-exogenous interdependence) and the other, marginalised and excluded from economic growth processes, based in ‘traditional’ indigenous industry and agricultural production (Tomlinson, 1991: 105).

Part of this dependent development is the resultant cultural practices of consumerism in the less developed societies resulting from aggressive marketing of capitalist products -‘world brands’- through advertising by trans-national corporations. Such consumerism is considered by some theorists such as Hamelink (a neo-Marxist) and the Frankfurt School’s critical theorists as constituting part of the exploitative capitalist system. Note, for instance, this observation by Tomlinson:

“Among Hamelink’s objections to the advertising practices of the trans-national corporations are (a) that they aim to exploit economically; (b) that they deliberately deceive and manipulate their audiences in the Third World; and (c) that they introduce commodities which are undesirable in themselves and in the process suppress better ‘traditional’ products.” (Tomlinson, 1991: 115)

The Frankfurt School provides a critique of consumerism through what appears to be more of incorporation theory according to which “the working classes are seduced by the superficial attractions of the culture of capitalism into acceptance of the terms of its economic structure: their subordinated and exploited class position”. Hence that the working class masses develop “false consciousnesses under the manipulative power of the media.” (See Tomlinson, 1991: 126)

Secondly and closely tied to the idea of dependent development leading to subordination of Third world indigenous cultures is the argument that capitalist culture changes the cultural practices of those that come into contact with it. Note, for instance, Salinas and Paldan’s claim, as observed by Tomlinson (1991), that the indigenous cultures of the dominated class are shaken by both the change of their objective situation in the sphere of material production and the imported cultural-ideological elements from the developed world. This view echoes the criticism by Hamelink (1983) of multinational capitalism and cultural imperialism using the concept of “cultural synchronization” or cultural homogenisation. As Tomlinson (1991) states, Hamelink developed an argument, based on his personal observations and experiences as a tourist in countries such as Mexico, Singapore and Saudi Arabia that along with the spread of global capitalism are processes of cultural synchronization or homogenisation. Based on those observations Hamelink argued:

“One conclusion still seems unanimously shared: the impressive variety of the world cultural systems is waning due to a process of ‘cultural synchronization’ that is without historic precedent...

...In the second half of the twentieth century, a destructive process that differs significantly from the historical examples ... threatens the diversity of cultural systems. Never before has the synchronization with one particular cultural pattern been of such global dimensions and so comprehensive.” (Hamelink, 1983: 3, and Tomlinson, 1991: 110)



Lash also advanced a similar reductionist neo-Marxist account of culture in his examination of modernity and post-modernity, which he argues are direct opposites. He argues that while modernization is a process of cultural differentiation whereby the cultural differentiates from the social, post-modernization is a de-differentiation process that blurs or collapses the boundaries between culture, economy, and politics. Hence that “we are living in a world where signs and spaces are increasingly shaping our lives” and whereby “images and spectacles are replacing narratives and history as core features of cultural life.”(in Swingewood, 1998: 225) For Smith (2001) such neo-Marxist views on culture during the modern and post-modern era are characterised by hostility to the aesthetic codes of postmodernism, by keenness to demonstrate the central role of capitalist forces and their influence on contemporary cultural shifts, as well as a concern to highlight the relationship between those shifts and the possibilities for human emancipation.

This account has its origins in Marx’s earlier observation and analysis of the universalisation and global expansion of the capitalist system as reflected in his remarks that:

“The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market give a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization...” (Marx, 1973: 71)

However, the above-outlined orthodox and neo-Marxist as well as the dependency theorists' accounts of culture and its role in human society came under strong criticism, revealing some of their serious conceptual limitations. Criticism came from Tomlinson amongst others who, while broadly in agreement with Hamelink's notion of cultural synchronization, find Hamelink and other neo-Marxists' pre-occupation with the class and class struggle implications of cultural imperialism and globalisation of capitalism problematic as they fail to examine the capitalist culture itself. Their failure to examine the capitalist culture resulted in their inability to recognise and acknowledge the ambiguous and contradictory nature of this culture. Tomlinson attributes this to the method of personal observations Hamelink used to arrive at his conclusions. Central to this method is the perceived threat of cultural synchronisation to diverse indigenous cultures.

According to Tomlinson, there are several other attendant problems associated with this method, making it highly unreliable. One such problem is the danger of paternalism characterised by both the claim that those in the West "know better" the needs of other cultures than members of those cultures themselves (hence that they need be protected from predatory multinationals), and the tendency to impute a sense of "irrational" false consciousness onto the Third World people or consumers of capitalist products. He argues that Hamelink failed to avoid this danger and tendency is as evidenced in his criticism of consumerism promoted in Third World societies through the marketing of pharmaceuticals, luring people away from effective traditional remedies. Note here Hamelink's observations as quoted in Tomlinson:

"In Bolivia, for example, advertising for Alka-Seltzer has increased sales, even though there are more effective and cheaper alternatives, such as mint tea. In many areas of Peru, the population is thoroughly convinced that anything bought in the pharmacy has to be better than natural products. Every self-respecting family has Aspro, which they use with less knowledge and more unpleasant side effects than do the naturally occurring medicines." (Tomlinson, 1991: 117)

Tomlinson dismisses this argument on the grounds that it fails to acknowledge that there may be many other factors irreducible to irrational false consciousness with influence on consumers' preferences and choices for products on the market. Thus,



while Tomlinson agrees with Hamelink that lack of information about the products could result in consumers making choices not in their interests, he however argues that this does not suggest that whenever consumers choose expensive versions, even when in possession of relevant information about products, are necessarily acting against their interests. Other factors at play, he argues, could include convenience in obtaining the branded product, disinclination to shop around, and also the consumers' actual experiences of the effects of those products (Tomlinson, 1991: 118). Hence, that Third World consumers' choose to purchase and use Western manufactured products could be based on their experiences of the effects of those products, as is the case with their Western counterparts. For Tomlinson, it is those common experiences rather than a lack of experience or irrational false consciousness on the part of Third World consumers that lead to common preferences for usage. Note here his arguments as quoted below:

"After all, the majority of Westerners probably prefer products like Aspro and Alka-Seltzer to 'natural remedies', so why should these choices be thought odd or 'mistaken' when made by people in the Third World?... For one must presume that the continued choice of manufactured pharmaceuticals has some relation to the experience of their effects ... it would seem that the reason Third World consumers prefer manufactures is that they experience them as being effective – that is, their experience is precisely the same as the common one in the West. This does not imply that the manufactures *are* more effective: the experience may be simply in terms of effect ..." (Tomlinson, 1991: 117)

Other factors at play include what Offe refers to as "structurally imposed needs" on the agents under modern capitalism resulting from structural differentiation and/or structurally differentiated roles of individuals such as consumer, worker, and parent. Note here the example of the consumption of cars or automobiles that Offe has used to illustrate this point:

"Consumers often regard automobiles not as a means of satisfying a 'need' (such as desire for mobility or the pleasure in driving) but, rather, as a response to urban living conditions which often make it 'impossible to live without a car'. In such frequently heard expressions, there is the suggestion that the apparently paradoxical need for an automobile is a need we could, in fact, do without: there is, in other words, a more or less vague awareness of the gap that exists between our needs and the demands forced upon us by the conditions in which we live." (Quoted in Tomlinson, 1991: 133)

Another tendency amongst the neo-Marxist and dependency theorists linked to the above, lies in their critique of the cultural imperialism and consumerism whereby they tend to undermine and present agents in the Third World countries as passive recipients and respondents to consumerism. This tendency is clearly challenged by the above quoted critique by Tomlinson since underlying it is the implication that agents in the Third world societies are active and make conscious, independent decisions and choices about what they consume. Hence, there is a tendency to over exaggerate the ideological power of consumerism. This tendency is evident in Marcuse, one of the main critics of consumerism. His argument is that while it is true that agents are the only ones that know what are true and false needs for them, under capitalist culture, they lack autonomy to make such independent decisions and choices. This, he argues, is due mainly to their being indoctrinated and manipulated by this culture. Within the context of this understanding, which as Tomlinson asserts is premised on the logic of the “true/false needs” and hence the idea of false consciousness, Marcuse claims that agents are unable to identify their “true” or “real” needs (Tomlinson, 1991: 128).

This, Tomlinson argues, has exposed Marcuse to criticisms from even his sympathisers such as Douglas Kelner. According to Kelner, Marcuse has provided a ‘totalising’ critique which fails to discriminate between more or less enjoyable, satisfying and ‘autonomous’ forms of consumption. This failure on the part of Marcuse and his “true/false needs” dichotomy has led him to further claim that vital needs such as “nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable level of culture” have unqualified claim for satisfaction, and are therefore “true” needs. Hence that these needs, unlike false ones, involve no ideological manipulation and that consumers’ choice for them is independent of such manipulation.

In what Tomlinson deems a sympathetic critique of Marcuse’s “totalising” theory, Kelner argued for the retention of the “true/false” dichotomy but suggested that there is a need for closer scrutiny of actual individual commodities. Such scrutiny would help to identify whether or not the commodities purchased are genuinely useful, life enhancing, well constructed and priced and thus in the classification of them as either meeting the “true” or “false” needs of consumers (Tomlinson, 1991: 129-131). Tomlinson points out that while Kelner makes this suggestion, he however acknowledges the difficulties involved in making such value judgements, since it is

the consumers themselves that are best placed to answer these questions and tell whether or not commodities truly meet their needs. Hence, that this reverts back to the problem of the “sovereign consumer” and to the need to recognise that agents are capable of making informed, independent decisions and choices. This critique is in line with that advanced by postmodernists against Marxist modernists and critical theorists’ views on consumption of material goods. As outlined by Larry Ray and Andrew Sayer, this is to the effect that:

“...not only postmodernists but also many liberals argue that this kind of critique (*i.e. modernist view on material consumption*) is elitist and dogmatic. It fails to recognize the ‘civilizing effects’ of market relations. It implies the dubious assumption that in the absence of capitalism’s imperatives, benign cultural norms and forms would automatically prevail. It is one-sided and undialectical in allowing a concern with the status of many cultural activities and products as commodities and sources of profit to obscure the way in which material consumption can be creative and enabling. It is anti-liberal in implying that individuals do not know what is in their best interest, and it ignores the way markets allow people to pursue their own conceptions of the good life by buying and selling as they choose. It implies an elitist distinction between high and low culture and a right to pass judgement on the tastes of others. It dogmatically and ethnocentrically proclaims as a universal and foundational, normative principles which are actually local, particular, and without any ultimate foundation...Furthermore, both liberals and postmodernists might argue that far from devaluing cultural goods, markets for them may oblige cultural producers to raise standards so as to survive against competitors. Critical theory and Marxism are biased against consumption, failing to appreciate that it can be active and creative, and hence a source of cultural innovation...” (see Ray and Sayer, 1999: 10-11)

Not only were problems found with the method of personal observations used by some neo-Marxists in their analysis of the global expansion of capitalism, but also with the assertions such as Salinas and Paldan’s that capitalist culture alters the cultures of Third world societies. This argument has, according to Tomlinson, been challenged in view of the evidence which points out that contrary to the claims about cultural homogenisation, trans-national corporations had to adapt their strategies and products to the cultural frameworks of Third world societies in which they operated. This, argues Tomlinson, is best illustrated by Sinclair’s argument that ‘cultural defences’ of the target markets in these societies have compelled transnationals such as Coca-Cola, Marlboro and MacDonald to adapt their advertising strategies for their

branded products to these societies' cultural conditions. To support this argument, Tomlinson cites an example, as provided by Sinclair, of the 1970s marketing campaign slogan used by General Motors to sell their Holden cars in Australia. To do so, General Motors made an appeal to the cars' essential "Australianness" by using this phrase: "Football, meat pies, kangaroos and Holden cars. They go together under the southern skies." As Tomlinson points out, Sinclair found that this slogan was a translated version of the one used in USA which went like this: "Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie and Chevrolet. They go together in the good old USA." (Tomlinson, 1991: 114) Hence, that this adaptation to different cultural contexts was critical to gaining competitive advantages.

This argument for the need to acknowledge the sovereignty of consumers and the reality of diversity echoes Swingewood's earlier argument and his critique of the Marxist art historians, Antal and Hauser's view that art as a cultural form constitutes an expression of dominant class interests. Swingewood was critical of the failure of this view to recognise the creativity of artists as active, autonomous agents and that it tends to pay a lip service to the idea of pluralism. To overcome these limitations, he suggests, Marxist theorists would need to recognise the differentiated nature of context and the manner in which art works as an autonomous part of the superstructure elements in shaping and not just simply reflecting the socio-economic relations. This, he argues, is necessary if a comprehensive theory of culture is to be developed (Swingewood, 1998: 12).

Swingewood finds Gramsci's later Marxist thesis of *hegemony*, (Gramsci, 1977), according to which change in the society lies in an interaction between economic, political and ideological structures, to be rather non-restrictive and constituting a step beyond the crude base-superstructure model. This critique and understanding suggests that historical processes are not products of impersonal and dominant economic forces but of creative agents and workings of what Gramsci calls 'human will' organised into collective forms such as trade unions and political parties. Such collective institutions are for him a driving force of the economy and effectively shape the objective reality. The role of culture and its institutions is here understood as being to legitimise and enhance consent by agents and collective institutions to the dominant ideologies and structures.

For Gramsci, such legitimation and consent help to ensure that hegemony works, and also enable both the active civil society to exist side by side with the political society or the state. This view highlights Gramsci's recognition of pluralism within society and his argument that the dominant forces cannot rule by exclusion of other actors or the exclusion of what he terms the voices of the subordinates. He argues that for stability to be achieved, it is necessary to have a balance between consent and coercion (in Swingewood, 1998; 14-15). As Barker (2003: 82) points out, for Gramsci, hegemony is "a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria ... between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups ... equilibria in which the interests of the dominant prevail, but only up to a certain point". Deriving from this Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Barker argues that hegemony "opens up the possibility of a challenge to it ... the making of a counter-hegemonic bloc of subordinate groups and classes" (Barker, 2003: 82).

Arguing along the same lines as Gramsci, which avoid narrow reductionist determinism, is Stuart Hall. This can be seen from his critical examination of classical Marxist conception of ideology, whereby he identifies weaknesses, limitations and strengths in that conception (Hall, 1996: 25). Based on his review, Hall adds to the critique that has been levelled at classical Marxists' tendency to reduce and ascribe ideas, practices, meanings and concepts (or simply ideology) to the dominant class and material conditions i.e. the notion that there is direct correspondence between "ruling ideas" and "ruling classes". He argues that rather than presenting the economic or concrete material conditions of existence (which constitute the base) as having a determinant influence on ideology, the former (i.e. the base) should be understood as only establishing parameters with constraining and limiting effects on the latter. Hall's argument reinforces Raymond Williams (1981)'s earlier view that the relationships between the economic and the cultural should be understood in terms of "setting limits", whereby the former only "sets limits on what can be done or expressed in culture" without determining "the meaning of cultural practices in a direct one-to-one relationship" (in Barker, 2003: 72).

He calls that limiting and constraining effect *determinancy*. Hall thus argues:

“What the economic cannot do is (a) to provide the *contents* of the particular thoughts of particular social classes or groups at any specific time; or (b) to fix or guarantee for all time which ideas will be made use of by which classes. The determinancy of the economic for the ideological can, therefore, be only in terms of the former setting limits for defining the terrain of operations, establishing the ‘new materials’, of thought. Material circumstances are the net of constraints, the ‘conditions of existence’ for practical thought and calculation about society.” (Hall, 1996: 44)

Gramsci’s emphasis on the importance of creative agents, human will and culture in socio-economic change and development is best evidenced by several of his writings. Note, for instance, in his piece entitled *Socialism and Culture*, where he defines culture as “... the organization, the disciplining of one’s inner self; the mastery of one’s personality; the attainment of a higher awareness, through which we can come to understand our values and place within history, our proper function in life, our rights and duties”(see Bellamy, 1994: 9-10). Arguing that this role of culture is not fulfilled through spontaneity beyond control of human will, but through social awareness marked by what he terms “intelligent reflection” and “a long process of intense critical activity, of new cultural insight...”, Gramsci cite the links between the French Revolution and the Enlightenment period, and the subsequent revolutions in Europe. The following highlights his account:

“The Enlightenment was a magnificent revolution in itself ... it created a kind of pan-European unified consciousness, a bourgeois International of the spirit, with each part sensitive to the tribulations and misfortune of the whole, which was the best preparation for the bloody revolution which would subsequently take place in France ... Later, when events in France had welded consciences throughout Europe still more tightly, a popular uprising in Paris could set off others in Milan, in Vienna, even in the smallest towns. To careless observers, all this may seem a natural, spontaneous phenomenon, but, in fact, it would be incomprehensible if we did not take into account the cultural factors which had already primed men’s minds so they were ready to explode for what was felt to be a common cause” (see Bellamy, 1994: 10-11).

However, while the above highlights Gramsci’s recognition of the autonomy of culture, it does not fully capture his main concern, which was to show the equal significance and instrumental relevance of culture to the proletarian or working class



consciousness and socialist struggle against capitalism. Hence that the “critique of capitalist civilisation”, which involve self-discovery, is in fact a cultural process. That culture is crucial to the socialist movement is noticeable from Gramsci’s support for the creation of a cultural association as a proletarian institution in Italy’s Turin to close what he saw as a gap in the proletarian socialist movement’s activities. Note here his articulation of the challenges facing the socialist movement then:

“One of the most serious gaps in our activities is this: we wait for the present moment to discuss problems and to determine the direction of our action. Out of urgency, we provide hurried solutions to problems, in the sense that not all those who take part in the movement have mastered the exact terms of the problems. Consequently, when they do follow the strategy established, they do so out of a spirit of discipline and out of the trust which they have in their leaders, more than out of inner conviction, of rational spontaneity. The result is that at every important hour of our history there occurs a breaking of the ranks, a giving in, internal disputes, personal issues. This also explains the phenomena of idolatry, which are a contradiction in our movement, letting back in through the window the authoritarianism that was kicked out of the door.

There is widespread resolute conviction. There is no long term preparation that makes one ready to deliberate at any moment that determines immediate agreements, effective and profound agreements that reinforce action.

The cultural association should see to this preparation, should create these convictions. In it one should be able to discuss in a disinterested way – that is, without waiting to be stimulated by current events - whatever interests or might one day interest the proletarian movement.” (in Forgas and Nowell-Smith, 1985: 22)

Gramsci’s support for the cultural association was also informed by his acknowledgement that “...political and economic action presupposes moral, religious and philosophical problems which the economic and political bodies cannot discuss...nor disseminate the proper solutions...” giving rise to what he termed spiritual crisis (see Forgas and Nowell-Smith, 1985: 22).

Arguing from a different ideological perspective and with a different motive to that of the Marxist Gramsci, Weber too acknowledged the autonomous and functional role of culture and idea elements in the society, and also the idea that agents are non-passive. For Weber human action is informed and influenced by cultural values and beliefs.

Social change and development, Weber argued, are the result of the 'internal rationality' of the human personality, its continuous, systematic self-control and discipline. His views on the role of cultural values and agents in social change and development are best represented in his analysis of the influence that the Protestant asceticism or Puritanism has on the development of the capitalist system in Western Europe. Note here his remarks:

"But it was in the ethic of ascetic Protestantism that it first found a consistent ethical foundation. Its significance for the development of capitalism is obvious. This worldly Protestant asceticism, as we may recapitulate up to this point, acted powerfully against the spontaneous enjoyment of possessions; it restricted consumption, especially of luxuries. On the other hand, it had the psychological effect of freeing the acquisition of goods from the inhibitions of traditionalistic ethics. It broke the bonds of the impulse of acquisition in that it not only legalized it, but looked upon it as directly willed by God. The campaign against the temptations of flesh, and the dependence on external things was ... not a struggle against the rational acquisition, but against the irrational use of wealth.

As far as the influence of the Puritan outlook extended, under all circumstances – and this is, of course, much more important than the mere encouragement of capital accumulation – it favoured the development of a rational bourgeois economic life; it was the most important, and above all the only consistent influence in the development of that life. It stood at the cradle of the modern economic life.

A specifically bourgeois economic ethic had grown up. With the consciousness of standing in the fullness of God's grace and being visibly blessed by Him, the bourgeois business man, as long as he remained within the bounds of formal correctness, as long as his moral conduct was spotless and the use to which he puts his wealth was not objectionable, could follow his pecuniary interests as he would and feel that he was fulfilling a duty in doing so. The power of religious asceticism provided him in addition with sober, conscientious, and unusually industrious workmen, who clung to their work as to a life purpose willed by God." (Weber, 1930: 170-177).

Contrary to the rigid Marxist base-superstructure model, and based on his analysis of the relationship between the ideology of Protestantism as a religious and a cultural orientation to the world and the development of capitalism, Weber recognised ideology as an active, autonomous element not tied to any particular social class interests. Hence, modern society is not characterised by a single dominant ideology but a network of autonomous fields and competing values (in Swingewood, 1998: 24).



However, while Weber's conception seems to have moved beyond the Marxist reductionist model, some conceptual problems were identified in his theory. Swingewood argues that Weber, in emphasising the autonomy of culture as a 'higher sphere' unaffected by other societal forces, failed to acknowledge that culture is imbricated in power relations. As Swingewood observed:

"...Weber's model of cultural differentiation poses serious problems for the sociology of culture: pluralism has the effect of collapsing culture into 'network' concepts and severing it from power and power relations. In contrast, Marxist Gramsci analysed culture as partly autonomous yet always imbricated in the structure of economic and class forces: culture was both a 'higher sphere' and yet one based in relations of power. Weber's sphere seems to float above the specifics of society, observing an ideal internal logic unaffected by the events, practices and structures in the external world." (Swingewood, 1998: 28-29)

Continuing with his critique, he said:

"Such formulations ... suffer from an excess of idealism at the expense of materialism. Thus while Weber theorises culture in terms of action, meaning and social bonds, of the ways in which agents produce and act on meaning and social bonds, the differentiation thesis remains too abstract and ahistorical. It fails to provide analytical concepts or categories which can link culture with other elements of society and ... it lacks historical specificity. What is the time-span for Weber's spheres? Are these spheres always autonomous?" (Swingewood, 1998: 29)

Weber's emphasis on the autonomy and plurality of culture and the active role of agents was reinforced by other classical theorists such as Durkheim. Durkheim's model is premised on the understanding that society is comprised of both the material basis and institutional structure, and that within the latter there are commonly shared beliefs and practices, collective organisations and forms of actions informed by moral concepts, legal rules and religious motions embodied in ideologies. Thus for Durkheim, it is within institutional structures that a common culture exists whose values and beliefs are shared and internalised by individuals organised into collective structures. Its role, as an autonomous element within the society, is to enhance communication between individuals and to influence their collective actions as well as to enhance social solidarity/integration or cohesion. Hence his argument is that social solidarity is not externally imposed but is achieved through a socially mediated

inter-subjective action (Swingewood, 1998: 54-56). Similar observation of Durkheim's work was made by Philip Smith (2001) who notes that for Durkheim, culture, its symbols and beliefs work to generate social order and social integration through the creation of "collective excitement or collective effervescence". This collective effervescence provides individuals with a strong sense of group belonging (Smith, 2001: 11).

Swingewood argues however that Durkheim's theory fails to transcend the Marxist reductionism which subordinates culture to material forces. Referring to Durkheim's theory as a "modified base-superstructure model", Swingewood argues that this theory provides a new form of reductionism whereby culture is understood in functional, instrumentalist terms of helping to enhance social solidarity and integration for collective interests. Hence he concludes that Durkheim's theory tends to "elide the cultural and the social." (Swingewood, 1998: 56) Closely linked to this is a critique by David Lockwood (1996) that the assumption in Durkheim's theory that culture brings consensus and social integration makes it difficult to account for the role of culture in generating conflict or generating social exclusion (Smith, 2001: 12).

Tilly (1981, quoted in Smith 2001) finds Durkheim's theory as tending to privilege the role of culture in bringing social stability and patterns of social interaction over other equally significant forces i.e. social agents posited as being passive, non-creative and non-active. Note for instance, Parsons's critique through his voluntaristic theory of action. In terms of this theory, and contrary to Durkheim's, human action is not made possible by internalised cultural values nor is it constrained by external social facts, but is enhanced by the social agents' conscious selection of those values and norms they consider to be legitimate (Swingewood, 1998: 57-58 and Smith, 2001: 12). Clearly this critique, as Swingewood asserts, does not dismiss the social integrative role of culture as, for Parsons, a common value system is an essential prerequisite for social integration. Rather Parsons was concerned with highlighting the active, creative role of social agents and the autonomous nature of culture as a value system irreducible to motivation, social interaction or social structure. Hence that contrary to the positivists, not all human action is attributable to contextual conditions of action (Swingewood, 1998: 57-58).

However, notwithstanding this emphasis on culture's autonomy and creativity of agents, Parsons' theory suffers some serious limitations as it tends to suggest that culture is tied to a dominant ideology of the triumphant capitalist system. This can clearly be noticed from Swingewood's argument that Parsons conceded the idea of common culture or central value system which serves as a normatively integrating structure. Hence, Parsons' view is that through participation in common cultures of society, individuals are able to define what is desirable and valuable (Swingewood, 1998: 58).

The other main limitation in Parsons' theory, also found in Durkheim's, is that he tended to be ambivalent on the question of the production and reproduction of cultural values. This failure has, according to Swingewood, resulted in teleological accounts which suggest that in the production of cultural values, agents only realise the existing values rather than actually creating the new ones. This conceptual limit is said to have resulted in their (i.e. Parsons and Durkheim) inability to recognise and acknowledge the divisive role of culture and its contribution to generation of conflicts between groups. Swingewood (1998) thus argues that by overlooking the realities of divisions and conflicts characterising society through an emphasis on the idea of stable, common culture, these theories run into the danger of assimilating and marginalising different cultural values to a "higher" level.

To address the limits of teleology in Parsons and Durkheim's theories, Jurgen Habermas developed a theory of communicative action according to which culture must be theorised in terms of action and communication (Swingewood, 1998: 63). Understanding humanity as "both a tool making and speaking agent", Habermas argues that social development and the production of culture are achieved through language or what he terms a "linguistically mediated social interaction". Habermas' view is based on his understanding of the society as both a "system world" and a "life-world". The former world is consisting of the state, capitalism, and large bureaucratic organisations and the latter refers to a "differentiated structure closely bound up with cultural values and communicative practices" characterised by solidarity, face-to-face contact, family, community, and substantive value commitments (Swingewood, 1998: 63-64 and Smith, 2001: 50). Hence that it is within the life-world that verbal communication and social interaction occurs.

Clearly Habermas' theory, like those of Weber, Durkehim and Parsons, is functionalist in orientation. Note, for instance, his view that action enhanced through verbal communication is instrumental to the maintenance of the social system as a whole since it is aimed to achieve narrowly defined goals within the existing institutions. Hence that cultural reproduction works through the life-world to secure continuity of tradition and coherence of knowledge for daily practice (Swingewood, 1998: 64). However, despite this obvious functionalism in Habermas' theory, Swingewood (1998) finds it to be non-restrictive as the idea of the co-existence of various communicative practices within the life-world suggests the possibility for open, free discourse among active agents. This is noticeable from Habermas' emphasis on the differentiation of the life-world and principles of autonomy of the life-world which enable rational communicative action based on co-operation with the view to establishing normative consensus. He thus dismissed as ahistorical the Frankfurt School's assertion that culture industry, as a predominant presence, absorbs all alternative modes of communication and instead argued that new movements may emerge within the life-world with values at odds with those of the dominant formal system linked to power, economic production and money (Swingewood, 1998: 65). This argument has dual implications. One is that there exist differences within the life-world which could enhance social interaction and communication necessary to achieve consensus and help reconcile those differences. Another implication is that of possibility of events and developments within the life-world that could destabilise the existing social system and pave way to changes.

Swingewood (1998) and Smith (2001) however point out to Habermas' later concerns about what he perceived to be the danger posed to the autonomy of the life-world by the system world imperatives, especially in the contemporary modern society. Note Habermas's concern as paraphrased by Swingewood:

“..., the dark side of this picture lies in the permanent tension between life-world and system, which remains especially acute in contemporary society. System imperatives governing production and profitability, the steering media of money and power combined with an increasing role for the state, seek to penetrate the structures of the life-world, thus distorting linguistically mediated interaction and undermining the rational and universal elements of truth embedded in language. Language itself now becomes dominated by the functional imperatives of formal, instrumental rationality, distorted communication which is imbricated

with domination. If systems imperatives succeed in 'colonising' the life-world in this way the result will be a centralisation of culture, bureaucratic rationality, increasing passivity and the decline of autonomy." (Swingewood, 1998: 65-66)

Similarly, Smith (2001: 51) points out to Habermas' claims that the 'media of exchange' of the system world – money and power – have become dominant and have prevented true communicative rationality, leading to the extinction of the public sphere at the hand of a capitalist mass media, the growth of meaningless ... bureaucracies, the subversion of democracy by big business, continuing inequality, and the substitution of passive workers, tax payers, and consumers for active debaters and communicators. It is not clear though whether or not these concerns by Habermas were influenced by Simmel's earlier similar views on the impact of modernity on culture. Understanding modernity in terms of it bringing tensions between "the rapid development of science, technology and objective knowledge and the erosion of subjective, personal culture", Simmel argued that the logic of modernity generates a crisis of modern culture. This, he argued using the term "tragedy of culture", transforms the creative subject into a passive object, reifying the products of human culture and effectively eliminating purposive human action (Swingewood, 1998: 33-34). Swingewood has however dismissed Simmel's thesis as both too abstract and non-historical. In substantiating this criticism, Swingewood argues:

"...there is no space for alternative modes of action, no awareness of culture as an element in social struggles and opposition to the existing power relations. The links between the different forms of cultural production are theorised so abstractly that the rich variety of cultural forms and institutions float free of specific social and historical contexts...

...The false antinomy of subjective and objective culture has the effect of eliminating the communicative basis of culture and the way in which, through the production of meanings and values, individuals relate to one another...

...theorising culture only within the framework of the superstructure breaks its living relation with those agents and institutions that produce and reproduce it contextually." (Swingewood, 1998: 35-36)

A more or less similar criticism was levelled at Habermas, whom his concerns as outlined above, are said to have seen him devoting himself to the revitalization of the life-world through the theory of communicative rationality in order to resist the colonization forces of the life-world. Smith (2001) argues, for instance, that Habermas's theory suffers from utopianism and idealism as his diagnosis of the ills of modern society is unaccompanied by concrete proposal of how a better world could be built. Furthermore, he argues that it fails to identify the institutional forms (e.g. diverse mass media and grass-roots social movements) that would be necessary to support and enhance actions for the achievement of such a world. Like the Frankfurt School, whose assertions Habermas dismissed as being ahistorical, he ironically came under similar criticism. As Swingewood puts it:

“...his theory of the colonisation of the life-world...suggests both a pessimistic and deterministic standpoint at odds with his rejection of the Frankfurt School theory. The problem is that Habermas has assimilated the making of these processes,..., to an underlying, ahistorical logic. Paradoxically, Habermas claims his approach as a form of genetic structuralism, but it lacks any real sense of historical time and specificity. The concepts of undistorted communication, life-world and system tend to lifeless abstractions analytically weak for grasping the complex and variable structures of contemporary society, the variety of cultural institutions and practices, and establishing the degree and nature of their autonomy. As with critical theory, Habermas fails to ground Weber's thesis of cultural differentiation contextually and to specify the internal complexity and hierarchical structure of the different spheres.” (Swingewood, 1998: 67)

Swingewood also dismisses Habermas's claim that his theory (i.e. Habermas's), which highlights tensions between the life-world and system world, transcends the lack of dynamism in Parson's functionalism. He argues that Habermas, like Parsons, fails to provide an historical account of how the structure (i.e. the life-world, the system, and communicative rationality) is produced and the role, if any, that human agency plays therein. Hence that the notion of social interaction between agents and different levels of society, both of which generate cultural values and act as the medium for their further development, is missing in both Parsons and Habermas' theories (Swingewood, 1998: 67).



## **Concluding Remarks**

Based on the above review, some inferences can be drawn towards an understanding of the role that culture plays within the socio-economic life of society. In the light of both the strong criticism of the crude Marxist base-superstructure model informed by evidence which reveals that the original theory of Marx and Engels on culture was never narrowly deterministic and functionalist, but that it constituted a subtle, flexible, bold dialectical model and other theoretical contributions such as Weber's and Parsons', one could argue that culture, like the economic material base, constitutes an autonomous force. The review suggests that its (i.e. culture's) influence on the society's socio-economic life could either serve to enhance consensus and social cohesion through shared values (thus helping to maintain current order and relationships) or generate conflicts and instability (which could be a source of either regressive or progress change). Note here Weber's notion of culture as an autonomous higher sphere, Durkheim's notion of "common culture", Parson's voluntaristic theory of action, and Habermas' theory of communicative action as outlined in the above review. That culture and its values could play either of these roles, is informed by the critique advanced by amongst others Lockwood, Swingewood, Parsons and Habermas of the teleological accounts which tend to overemphasise the socially integrative role of culture whereby agents either submit to the existing values or make selection from amongst those dominant values.

Such teleological accounts tend to ignore the active role of the agents in the production of culture with the likelihood of effecting changes to the existing dominant value system as new values are being created. This implies the existence of an active, dynamic relationship between culture and the human agency with determinant influence on the socio-economic life of society that could either lead to reinforcement of the existing dominant system/s through promotion of social consensus or to conflicts, disruption and significant changes. Thus culture and its values could act upon human agents by influencing their actions and choices and/or be acted upon by human agents using cultural values to either advance their interests or legitimise the existing order. They could also generate new values consistent with pursuance of new goals.

Also noted from the review in this chapter is that in the current modern and post-modern world is characterised by complexities brought by globalisation, and in view of the idea of cultural defences owing to active as opposed to passive human agency, the notion of single dominant and stable culture becomes difficult to sustain. Even Marxist art historians such as Antal and Hauser, although they reverted to the Marxist's narrow determinism, do however acknowledge that in the art world, there is the plurality of styles (Swingewood, 1998: 10). Thus diversity of cultures, practices and approaches is a reality that cannot be ignored. This is in line with the idea of cultural defences that are said to be blocking tendencies towards cultural homogenisation as capitalism expands at the global level. In short, culture, in its relationship to and like other aspects of human society such as the economic system, the legal system and ideology, constitutes an autonomous force that has a role within the socio-economic life of society.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Culture and Economic Development: A Review of the East Asian Experiences**

Having established at the theoretical level the nature of the relationship between culture and economy, in this chapter, an attempt will be made to determine, through examination of empirical research and review of the ongoing debates, the role that culture and/or value systems play in the East Asian region's economic life and development. It is thus the purpose of this chapter to test the validity of the theoretical viewpoints outlined in the previous chapter by looking at the actual lived experiences of economic development in the East Asian region's countries such as Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The East Asian region was specifically chosen in view of the extensive amount of historical and contemporary research, literature and debate in which concerted efforts were and continue to be made to explain and come to grips with what has often been dubbed the economic miracle in the post-war period up to the present. Within this debate, strong evidence, in spite of some counter accounts which emphasise the significance of non-cultural factors (Castells, 1998; Pinkstone, 2000; and Sen, 2001), points out to the role of the Confucian cultural values in the East Asian countries' economic development.

Amongst some of the earliest studies which support this viewpoint is that by Ayal (1963) in which he undertook a comparative analysis of the East Asian and South East Asian countries' economic developmental experiences using the case studies of Japan and Thailand representing these two regions respectively. In this study, Ayal's hypothesis, later confirmed by his research findings, was that no sustainable economic development could be achieved if changes in the socio-political institutions and high levels of foreign investments are not backed up by fundamental human values that are conducive to development. Ayal however qualified his point by arguing that not all cultural or value systems would have positive influences on economic activities, only those that contain what he terms "certain propensities" could have such influence. The "propensities" which make value systems economically relevant, are the following: propensities to accumulate; to work systematically and diligently; to co-operate in organizing effort for pursuance of goals; and to innovate (Ayal, 1963: 39). By propensities, Ayal refers to "internalised behaviouristic and instrumental values, or predispositions to actions, which have their origins in the value system" or simply behavioural modes influenced by the value system. This view was later expressed by O'Malley (1988), who also did a comparative study of both the East Asian and South East Asian regions. In his acknowledgement of difficulties that accompany any

attempts to establish connections between culture and development, he argued that this could be overcome through a shift in focus from a vague discussion of culture and development as whole concepts to the isolation of those specific virtues and elements in the cultural system that have relevance and positive effect on economic actions and decisions (O'Malley, 1988: 343). For Ayal, the role of value systems in economic development is two-fold: to provide goals that may not necessarily be economic in nature but achievable through economic activity (e.g. a goal of achieving high social welfare) and also to sanction the means i.e. propensities or activities associated with them, for achieving those goals.

Ayal argues, based on his analysis, that contrary to the South East Asia's Thailand, the Japanese value system had elements that promoted and encouraged the above propensities, which consequently played a vital enhancing role in its economic development. Those elements were: active fulfilment of obligations of class status and loyalty, asceticism and frugality, development of expertise in carrying out one's task as well as diligence in performing those tasks (Ayal, 1963:43). These elements were, Ayal argues, strongly linked to the political value system as reflected in the religious teachings of Confucianism which promoted forms of activity that are encouraged by the political values. Central to the political value system was the value that encouraged loyalty to the state in order to enhance the smooth functioning of organic society. Hence, Confucianism was integrated into an official ethic forming the basis for the system of administration and law.

Later studies such as Chaibong Hahm's (1999) provide a useful explanation of this close affinity and relationship between the Confucian culture and the political system. According to Chaibong, a central feature of the Confucian value system is an emphasis on the importance attached to family and the notion of Confucian familism. Family, he argues, is considered as a model on which human relations and institutions should be based. Hence, in Confucian culture, no distinctions are drawn between the public and private spheres as both are guided by similar family-based principles. Thus for Confucians, a family is seen as a training ground for public functions. Note for instance Chaibong's observation based on his analysis of the passage from what is known as the *Great Book*, one of the books on neo-Confucianism:

“What can be gleaned from this passage is that Confucians regarded cultivating the self, regulating the family, and governing the state as inherently the same thing, requiring the application of one and the same principle. More important, it is not much a matter of extending personalist ethics to the public sphere as the application of public virtue to the private realm. That is, Confucianism is the effort to regard family not as the repository of the private but rather as the training ground for public-spiritedness. ... The principle or the attitude one applies to the government of the family is not exclusivity, clannishness, or parochialism. Rather, the principle and attitude one applies in bringing peace to the world and in governing the state are also to be applied to the family.” (Chaibong, 1999: 42)

This, argues Chaibong, is attributable to two key values within the Confucian tradition i.e. filial piety and loyalty to the king or political leader. Unlike in the West, the Confucian state or the political realm is not seen as the repository of formal rules and laws or the realm in which procedural justice is the norm, but rather as the realm in which informal or personalist norms such as humaneness, harmony, and reciprocity rule. Hence that “the king or the political leader looks after the people in the same way as a father looks after his family, the point being that the Confucian family is itself already highly public in nature.” (Chaibong, 1999: 45)

The Confucian cultural context enabled the state, considered as both a realm in which Confucian morality is practised and a locus of values, norms, rituals and ethics, to play a leading exemplary economic role. It fulfilled this through strategic allocation of resources to and investment in productive sectors such as education and production departments, which could directly turn out products (Zhan, 1988). As a replicate of the family, the state promoted Confucian virtues. To enhance the acceptance of these virtues by the society, while simultaneously investing little in non-production sectors such as health, welfare, labour insurance and housing, it provided material welfare to the citizens (Chaibong, 1999). Confucian virtues promoted by the state such as thrift and self-reliance saw great attention being drawn to capital accumulation through personal savings deposits (Zhan, 1988; and Chaibong, 1999).

Ayal (1963) cited as evidence of the influence of the Confucian value system on economic life in Japan the class-based ethical movements that embraced the systems’ dominant virtues. Part of this wider class-based movement, which he cited as an illustrative example, is the movement of the commercial farmers known as *Hotoku*.

The latter's economic principles emphasised the need for increase in production and productivity improvement. Its principles also encouraged hard work, co-operation and rigorous voluntary restriction of consumption as well as re-investment of production surplus. The values of co-operation and hard work, and their resultant positive influence on production, were further enhanced by adherence to the notion and principle of "favors". This notion and principle was, according to Ayal, based on the idea that individuals' coming into being and/or acceptance of protection or status within a collective or a group automatically renders him/her the recipient of favors and imposes a sense of obligations to the source/s of the favors. Such obligations are met not through retirement to mundane activities but through service and active physical participation (Ayal, 1963: 43).

This *activist* nature of the Japanese value system, which promoted and dynamised the activities that incorporated the propensity to accumulate; to work diligently and systematically; as well as to co-operate in the carrying out of tasks; and to innovate, has, according to Ayal, played a vital role in the country's quick economic development. This occurred within the context in which challenges and pressures from the Western powers were immense, thus necessitating countervailing action to avert them. The Japanese, he argues, thus identified as their long term national goals, the need to strengthen their nation and maintain its power and prestige. They linked the achievement of this long term goal to economic development. Hence, that the Japanese value system played a significant role in this regard by promoting and legitimising the appropriate means for achieving the national goals i.e. the economic propensities, while at the same time innovatively integrating the Western methods, techniques and customs.

While in Japan economic growth happened at a rather faster rate during the immediate post-war period, in Thailand the opposite was the case. This was so despite the active support and direct participation by the government through the organisation of co-operatives, credit facilities, the industries' sending of students abroad and inviting of foreign experts and advisers. Ayal attributed this slow economic growth to the Thai value system, which, unlike the Japanese's system, did not contain economic propensities relevant and conducive for development. Central to the Thai value system were three main virtues which he found to be very much similar and consistent

with Buddhism. Those are the centrality of personal values; the model of the ideal personality and/or ideal self; as well as emphasis on individualism as opposed to collectivism.

Unlike the Japanese value system, which emphasises political values such as loyalty to authorities and mutual obligations in line with the principle of favors; the centrality of personal, individualised values within the Thai system places no obligations on individuals or formal collective institutions. This, Ayal (1963) argues, is in line with the Buddhist teachings which encourage individuals to spend their entire lives working out and improving their own *karma* (i.e. reborn with higher worldly status in the next reincarnation or in the current one) through merit-making. Forms of merit making that could be engaged in included becoming a monk for life or for a limited period with all worldly deprivations that go with it; helping others to become monks; feeding monks on daily basis; and building temples and other religious structures. Also observed by Ayal in the Thai value system is the absence of incentive to work towards increasing and expanding the already acquired merit through capital accumulation due to the view that merit in itself constitutes wealth and therefore does not need to be expanded.

The other virtue, which Ayal claims to have inhibited productive economic activity, is that of the model of ideal personality or ideal self, which is expected to be comprised of the following main attributes as its ethical components: *karuna* (compassion), *metta* (loving kindness), *mudita* (emphatic joy), and *uppekha* (equanimity which involves impartiality and non-attachment) all of which are said to be highly valued by the Thais who see themselves as possessing the most desirable attributes (Ayal, 1963: 47). While in Japan cultural values found expression in the ethical movements, in Thailand such expression was found in individuals' daily behaviour and actions. The most prominent virtues that influenced daily behaviour and actions of the Thais are the *choei* (an equivalent of *uppekka*) which encouraged non-involvement and calmness under all circumstances. Hence, the high tolerance for deviant behaviours, and *samuk* (an equivalent of *muditta* emphasising enjoyment) - according to which life is something to be enjoyed here and now with little regard for future complications. Within the context of such value system, the means employed to achieve one's *karma* are advised to be as *samuk* as possible. Hence such *samuk* actions aimed to achieve

*karma* are incompatible with productive economic activities as the latter activities were seldom *sanuk* or enjoyable but often hard and unpleasant (Ayal, 1963: 47).

The third and final economically inhibitive virtue within the Thai value system as identified by Ayal (1963), and which was deeply anchored in Buddhism, was the emphasis on individualism. This is clearly consistent with the *uppekkha* (non-involvement and non-attachment value within Buddhism) and explains the virtual absence of any organised social structures such as clubs, pressure groups and parties. Structures that existed such as the government bureaucracy, the Buddhist churches and the family units were, as observed by Ayal, loosely organised. The closeness of Thai individualism to Buddhism was further evidenced by the Buddhists' belief that every individual would be rewarded according to his/her own deeds, thoughts and cravings and hence the following saying "Do good, receive good, do evil, receive evil." (Ayal, 1963: 491)

While Ayal's study was conducted in the early 1960s reflecting on the immediate post-war period and hence the situation in the 1950s and 1960s, the subject of the relationships between value systems and/or culture and economy in the East and South East Asian regions continued to spark interest and receive great attention within the intellectual, research community in the subsequent decades up to the present period. For example O'Malley (1988)'s comparative study of the role played by culture in the economies of both the East Asian countries (focusing in particular on Japan, Republic of Korea, and Taiwan) and South East Asian countries (in particular Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines) in the 1980s.

Interestingly and like Ayal two decades before, O'Malley (1988) advanced an argument that the East Asian countries' value systems or culture, influenced strongly by Confucianism, played a positive role in these countries' economic life. As a code of ethics and conduct and not a religion that emphasised an afterlife, Confucianism which culturally bound together the peoples of East Asian countries as well as Chinese people in spite of their separate histories and different socio-religious orientations, played an influential role in guiding social relationships. Like Ayal, O'Malley discovered that the culture of Confucianism placed an emphasis on hierarchical relationships within the society i.e. the superior-subordinate relations



whereby the duty of the latter is to show respect, loyalty and deference while the former is expected to provide proper moral example and to act in accordance with his/her status. This, he argues, created a sense of common understanding of mutual expectations between the superiors and the subordinates. This supports Ayal (1963)'s earlier findings with respect to the Confucian culture in Japan whereby amongst its core values are those that emphasise the need to show loyalty to political authorities and mutual obligations amongst people.

Within such cultural framework, O'Malley (1988), in seeking to understand the economic impact of this culture, focused specifically on its influence on the relationships between government and private business organisations. The government's role came to be understood as being to formulate and implement appropriate and conducive policies for development. The governments in East Asian countries, with the exception of Japan which already had democracy, were authoritarian and characterised by centralised bureaucracies which enabled them to execute their functions in exemplary manner as promoted by the Confucian value system. This was thus justified by the view that if the government runs the country properly, then the welfare of its people would be enhanced and improved. O'Malley (1988:333) observed that governments in East Asian countries were modelled on family units whereby the relationships are based on respect, support and common acknowledgement of mutual obligations. These are values that are at the centre of the Confucian culture (Chaibong, 1999: 42 and 45).

O'Malley however also discovered that not only were the governments in the three East Asian countries organised in community-like and family-like ways, but also private business organisations with an emphasis on team spirit and mutual respect. Confucian values within business organisations, argues O'Malley, encouraged loyalty to the firm and mutual (even personal) sacrifices of time, emotion, and money for the common and collective good of the firm. These were further enhanced by the fact that employees of successful firms (i.e. both managers and labourers) were almost guaranteed life-long employment, predictable advances in salary and rank as well as comparatively small wage gap between employees both at the top and the bottom (O'Malley, 1988: 335). As far as the relationship with the government is concerned, the latter's role was to provide guidance and assistance in the form of research funds,



credit facilities and marketing-strategy capacity based on a longer and wider view without interfering with normal corporate/business activities. Hence, the realisation by both government and private companies that “the state needs the market and private enterprises needs the state; once both sides recognised this, co-operation was possible and high speed growth occurred”(Johnson, 1982 quoted in O’Malley, 1988:335).

Contrary to the findings in the East Asian region, O’Malley’s research found that in Southeast Asian region, the value systems played no vital role in their economies which were largely characterised by slow growth and in some cases decades of stagnation. The major belief systems in these countries are religions (mainly Buddhism, Islam and Christianity), which place strong emphasis on an afterlife whereby one’s good place in the next life is largely shaped by his/her performance in the current life. In Christian and Islamic religions, the important relationship is not between the superior and the subordinate person but rather between the person and God. Thus, a good handling of interpersonal relationships on earth is seen not as an end in itself but a means to an end (a good life in heaven). This is not so different from Buddhism which, as noticed from Ayal’s work, stresses that relationships between people should be smooth so as to enhance an attainment of merit or *karma*. Another element within the Southeast Asian values system different from the East Asian is that less importance is attached to family or extended family as a social unit in the society. The dead were not held in high regard but instead it was believed that ancestral status and the respect that goes with it should be earned (Ayal, 1963:339, taken from Wolters, 1982). Unlike Confucian culture, which idealises state administrators, both Buddhism and Christianity have their own separate and parallel hierarchies to those of the state. This, according to O’Malley (1988), may potentially cause conflicts and tensions between religious and secular administrations. Hence religion in Southeast Asia, unlike Confucianism in East Asia, provides no automatic support to the government.

The institutional framework in Southeast Asia is, according to O’Malley (1988), characterised by strong military, highly bureaucratised single-party states and a wide diversity of business organisations. The latter comprised private business concerns operating mainly within commerce, extraction and in production of bulk goods for

local markets; state-owned firms; international firms concentrated mainly within banking and commerce, and production for both local and overseas markets; government-protected firms which operate mainly in the service and processing areas; as well as local firms run by local Chinese businessmen.

This institutional framework, whereby the government owns some of the business concerns, has according to O'Malley, obstructed the development of harmonious and fruitful relations between government and industry, as the former would be seen to be uneven-handed in its treatment of the latter. O'Malley also pointed out that the governments in Southeast Asia lacked the capacity to offer industry support in the form of marketing assistance in overseas markets and a long-range analysis. The failure of government officials and business leaders to share common educational, ethnical or even regional background, further strained the relationships between government and business. This, argues O'Malley, resulted in Southeast Asian governments, except for Singapore and Indonesia, pre-occupying themselves more with concerns about regional instability or regime maintenance than with development.

Further evidence pointing out the links between societal culture and economy (or rather the relevance and influence of the former on the latter) arises from Ching (1997)'s study of factory regimes within the Chinese capitalist system, based on the case studies of two electronic plants situated in South China. Although Ching's main concern was to examine the nature of the factory production regimes and modes of labour regulation under the Chinese capitalist system in the factories concerned (i.e. she did not set out to examine the relationship between culture and economy), her study and its findings have revealed the existence of those links between culture and economy (albeit their exploitative nature as will be outlined below). Ching's study shows that the links were enhanced by management's manipulation of workers' cultural values (i.e. familism, loyalty, thrift, co-operation, and favors) and workers' social networks and identities to legitimise and exert greater control over them (workers). The result was a positive influence (as desired by managements) helping to forge stable, peaceful workplace relations and leading to improved performance of work. Thus the capitalist production regimes and power inequalities were legitimised and reinforced.

By factory regime, Ching is referring to what Michael Burawoy (1985) defined as the political form of production that is comprised of both the labour process (referring to the technical and social organisation of work) and the political apparatus of production (i.e. institutions such as that state and unions that regulate and shape workplace politics). As she indicates, Burawoy drew distinctions between two types of factory regime i.e. the despotic regime characterised by coercive labour control over wage dependent workers on the one hand, and the hegemonic regime characterised by consent on the other, enhanced by state intervention through social welfare programmes, union recognition and collective bargaining agreements which help reduce workers' dependence on wages and managerial domination.

Based on her findings at the two Chinese-run factories in Hong Kong and mainland China's Shenzhen district, Ching came to the conclusion that factory production regimes, over and above the understanding offered by Burawoy, have cultural logics to them. In both the Hong Kong and Shenzhen plants, work was organised along gender hierarchical lines with females constituting the majority of their production employees (i.e. 80 per cent and employed as assembly-line workers and line leaders) while male workers constituted only 20 per cent of the workforce and were mainly employed as repairers, foremen, and managers. Thus the regimes of both plants were characterised by gendered hierarchies. The only difference in workforce composition between the two plants, argues Ching, was that most of the female workers at the Hong Kong plant were middle-aged mothers whereas at Shenzhen they were mostly young and single.

Her study discovered that the factory regimes in both the Hong Kong and Shenzhen plants were respectively hegemonic and despotic. She argues that as systems of domination and control over women workers, they worked through "the cultural agencies of workers and management, their collective subjectivities and practices." In Shenzhen, control was exerted through a visibly, overt punishment-oriented despotic regime that could be seen from the fencing of the factory grounds; the employment of baton-carrying security guards; mottos written on the walls such as "No Spitting, Ask Your Supervisor When You Have Problems, and Quality Comes First"; the new recruits being required to read a ten-page hand book on regulations with despotic codes and penalties known as *Factory Regulations*; physical controls; timed labour

and fixed working hours paced through the use of shop-floor bells and punch-card machines; and docking of wages (Ching, 1997: 121-122).

This despotic regime, which Ching referred to as *localistic despotism* and found to be detested by workers, gave rise to the development of localistic networks and practices for the purposes of both surviving and countering the harsh regime. Those localistic networks and practices were characterised by workers' identification of each other through their province or county of origin and by local persons who brought them to Shenzhen rather than by names; the use of different local dialects to mark exclusivity and boundaries of localistic communities; extension of petty favors between locals; usage of signals to alert about the approaching managers, teaching each other work skills, helping each other to clear piled-up work, gestures such as pulling local's pony-tail or a sudden punch on the back whenever there is a chance to move around the shopfloor; and dropping little notes to poke fun (Ching, 1997).

Ching writes about the social construction of women workers as *maiden workers or working maidens*, in the local Cantonese language called *dagong mui* and how this is used in their exploitation. This notion of maiden worker "emphasised young women's single status, immaturity, imminent marriage, short-term commitment to factory work at Shenzhen, low job aspirations, and low motivation to learn skills" (Ching, 1997: 125). The social construction of women workers' identity, together with management's awareness and tolerance of localistic practices and networks on the shopfloor, have according to Ching's study findings, helped to legitimise the relegation of women workers to low-ranked unskilled job positions as well as to enhance kin control over women workers by their male counterparts in positions of foremanship and supervision from similar local areas using localistic or familistic authority. Note here Ching's argument to this effect:

"Because management judged that maiden workers worked only until they had saved enough for their dowries, that they were keener on preparing for marriage than for a career in factory work, only male recruits were groomed to acquire firm-specific technical skills. The promotion track from repair worker to technician, assistant foreman, and then supervisor was denied to women workers." (Ching, 1997: 125)

While in Shenzhen the regime was despotic, in Hong Kong, Ching found a rather more liberal type of factory regime based on consent from subordinates. The liberal nature of this regime was noticeable from amongst others the following practices: the invisibility of despotic codified rules; workers' wearing of own clothes as opposed to uniform company clothes; the air-conditioned, brightly lit shop floor; exchanges of greetings between women workers and security guards accompanied by smiles; absence of management-imposed canteen routines; newspaper reading before starting work; absence of physical controls over workers and restrictions on their bathroom visits; unquestioned lateness for work and pitching in for each other – even by line leaders in cases of absence or lateness; passing and eating of snacks; permission to make and receive calls during working hours; and freedom amongst line leaders with intimate knowledge of the habits of their experienced line girls to swap tasks in defiance of the designs from the engineering department (Ching, 1997).

She called the regime in the Hong Kong plant a *familistic hegemony* as it was characterised and underpinned by familistic practices and shopfloor discourses through which, as Ching (1997) puts it, “gender and class relations were socially constructed and collectively apprehended”. This, she argues, not only enabled women to endure their job but also to reaffirm their identities and commitment to family. This was so as the shopfloor discourses were mostly characterised and dominated by themes centred around family life such as the “children,” focusing on children’s school performances and health conditions, “relations with men,” in which tips were provided to single women on how to date, woeful stories about divorce, single motherhood, sex, and extramarital affairs (Ching, 1997: 128).

To further reinforce women’s gender identities and roles, Ching argues, the management used a Cantonese expression *Si Lai* - a term which refers to a domineering and matronly wife and a mother in a working-class family- to address women workers. In fact the management at the Hong Kong plant not only tolerated the above behaviours by women workers but also accommodated family-based identities in the company policy in which family problems are accepted as legitimate grounds for granting of emergency leave and being absent from work. Ching argues that management tolerated women workers’ behaviour as long as it did not jeopardise and undermine production. Hence the liberalising of the regime by management

helped to both provide workers with self-policing autonomy for the sake of production since the women employees in the plant had extensive work experience, which led to enhanced performance and reaching of production targets (Ching, 1997: 127-128). Ching argues that the construction of women workers as the *Si Lai* was an instrumental ploy by management to legitimise women's non-promotion and their relegation of women to low paying jobs.

Ching found that the effectiveness of the regimes in the two firms was enhanced by the institutional context in which there was no or limited state intervention through the provision of social welfare grants to workers, the regulation of the labour market as well as labour relations. Within such a framework, workers became heavily dependent on low wages while management and/or employers enjoyed high level of autonomy in the handling of employment and labour matters. According to Ching, managements in both firms developed their labour control strategies in response to the organisation of their respective labour markets and corresponding characteristics of workers as perceived by management (Note the earlier discussion about women workers being referred respectively as *maiden workers* and *sai lai*. Also see Ching, 1997:134-139).

In Shenzhen, for instance, Ching found that the decentralised state system led to the management developing clientalist relations or *guanxi* with local state bureau responsible for taxation, import and export duties as well as labour management in order to obtain preferential terms on investments and less regulated, flexible labour environment. She argues that those clientalist relations, which the management took great care to maintain, involved both participation in the gift economy (which included the sending of expensive gifts during Chinese festival, the hosting of dinner banquets and karaoke parties, home visits, donations to local schools, etc) and the manipulation of the clientalist relations with one bureau to counter the unwarranted encroachment by the other. Hence her argument that clientalism served to enhance managerial authority in Shenzhen where there were no explicit laws specifying minimum wages, no social insurance legislation, compulsory trade union recognition, or collective bargaining to protect workers from arbitrary dismissals (Ching, 1997: 132-133). As Ching points out, her research findings constitute a challenge to



Burawoy's argument that state intervention and regulation is the key factor distinguishing both the despotic and hegemonic factory regimes (Ching, 1997: 134).

While the above review points to strong evidence of the influence of culture, and especially Confucian culture, on the economic life in the East Asian region (in some cases due to the manipulative management strategies) some scholars are raising doubts about the strength and validity of the value-based or culture-based accounts. This has particularly been so in the light of the equally rapid economic growth and performance in the South East Asian region in recent years. Brian Pinkstone (2000), for instance, attributes the economic development in the South East Asian region to the US Aid and trade policies that were designed to thwart the spread of communism in the immediate post-war period and to the active industrial policies through which a variety of rewards and punishments were used to promote export oriented industrialisation. Policy instruments used by governments in the region ranged from "privileged access to investment capital at low interest rates, to tax breaks, tariffs, export subsidies and, later direct help with research and development"(Pinkstone, 2000: 8-9). Along with deregulation of capital markets during the 1980s in the advanced capitalist countries, most Asian countries including Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia in South East Asia opened their markets to foreign investments in order to provide a once-off boost to growth, which in turn gave rise to strong growth performances in these countries (Pinkstone, 2000: 8).

Castells questions the value-based accounts, with the effect of dismissing them. According to him, central to the growth and development in the East Asian countries (i.e. Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, as well as mainland China), were non-cultural factors. I will start by briefly outlining his account of economic development in each of these countries in the East Asian region. I will then provide an analysis of his account in the context of the insights outlined earlier on of the Confucian value system and its influence on the society, including on the economic activities. In Japan, Castells (2000) found that social stability and relative labour peace attributed to commitment to serving national interests (i.e. nation building) played a crucial role. As he points out, the Japanese state's main priority was for Japan to first survive, secondly compete globally, and finally assert itself through industrial production, economic management and technological innovation.

Also critically important was the Japanese educated, hard working and productive labour force, whose low wages were cushioned by a comprehensive state welfare system leading to improved access to consumption and living standards. Linked to this is the flexible labour market characterised by flexible labour practices, few workers rights (especially in small firms), and part-time work done mainly by women who oscillate between child rearing and being employed. In fact, women, whose numbers were increasing in the labour market, constituted the largest portion of flexible workers and/or vulnerable workers. The labour market situation in Japan, Castells argues, was supported by the system of strong, stable patriarchal families which not only reproduced traditional values and work ethics in the workplace within the context of national cultural homogeneity but also through family unity, cancelled the negative effects on women and poverty. Hence patriarchy and cultural homogeneity served as one of the major ingredients in Japanese growth and development (Castells, 2000: 221-225 and 231)

Also crucial according to Castells, to Japan's growth and development was its government-backed financial system in which cash-loaded government-controlled banks were found to be eager to lend at low interest to preferred customers deemed to be pursuing business projects that are in the interest of the nation. Government ensured that no bank went bankrupt and thus collateralised loans by property and shares, with the effect that risk was minimised (i.e government serving as protector to banks lending to the preferred customers - the Keiriketsu).

As in Japan, Castells found that in South Korea, growth and development was led by the state through a nationalist project in which support was channelled to the domestic home-grown large corporations, *Chaebols*. Reliance on Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) was discouraged. The state, through its control over the financial institutions, was able to provide funding to only selected customers considered to be involved in a project considered consistent with national goals. FDIs were only encouraged in the 1970s after the local industry had found a strong footing. Only those foreign companies that could facilitate technology transfer were allowed to go into equity holding arrangements with domestic companies with restrictions to a maximum of 50% of shares. The state's role took the form of infrastructure development, promotion of exports, emphasis on product and process innovations, technology and



science, as well as the establishment of specialised Research & Development Institutes to support industrial development. This, Castells (2000) argues, resulted in South Korea's four leading *chaebols* (Hyundai, Daewoo, Gold Star and Samsung) penetrating the world markets and becoming amongst the largest conglomerates in the world as well as enjoying a great share of world domestic production between 1965-1986. Another contributing factor to South Korea's development and growth was, according to Castells (2000), its educated, hard working labour force, improved living conditions, and reduced income inequality.

While in South Korea and Japan, the national states promoted large corporations for industrial development, Castells (2000) found that the states in Taiwan and Hong Kong gave support to small-medium scale firms with export orientation. In Taiwan, Castells argues, the state supported export-orientation of the small-medium scale firms through both the foreign Aid and liberalization of the trade controls as well as the comprehensive strategy for attracting foreign investments. To protect and support domestic firms, the state brought their links with the foreign ones through sub-contracting, thus helping to lay the foundation of industrialization (Castells, 2000: 267-268). Other factors that Castells finds to have contributed to the economic development in Taiwan are locally generated capital through small-medium scale firms and family savings as well as co-operative savings networks (*also known as the huijs*) (a good example being the rural based network of firms which supplied 50 per cent of world's umbrellas) as well as the presence of an educated, low waged workforce and higher living standards (Castells, 2000: 268).

Similarly in Hong Kong, industrialization and development through small-medium scale firms was, according to Castells (2000), enhanced by active state intervention. This was achieved through greater capital investment (capital generated from leasing out of the Crown Land as opposed to selling of this land) in mass public housing, construction of premises for housing of small and medium level manufacturing firms, and building of domestic firms. While the relative low prices of manufactured goods and the low labour costs have been equally vital, Castells also found that the state actively promoted export-orientation through the following measures: the distribution of export quotas allowed under trade agreements with other countries (especially in the Commonwealth); the establishment of information and training centers such as

the Hong Kong Productivity Centre; establishment of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council with offices around the world to promote exports and disseminate information on domestic firms; and also through establishment of the Credit Insurance Corporation to help cover some of the risks incurred by exporting firms. The state intervention was also extended through the massive public expenditure in housing, education, health, and also through subsidization of mass transport and food stuffs. All of these, Castells argues, amounted to indirect wages for the low paid but educated, hard working labour force. This, he argues, also reduced pressure on the small-medium scale firms that also relied on family savings, thus allowing them to accumulate and sustain themselves.

As in other East Asian countries, Castells found that in Singapore, the state played a central role in the country's economic growth and development. This, he argues, was through generation of local capital and direct investment in infrastructure, public corporations and in real estate; through attraction of foreign direct investments (FDIs) using incentives such as business friendly legislations; as well as through high public expenditure e.g. subsidized public health and education. The latter, together with relatively high wages, high living standards, and reduced income inequality ensured that the labour force is both educated and committed to working hard, which in turn further bolstered stability conducive to growth and development (Castells, 2000: 259-261).

Based on the above account, Castells thus finds that in spite of some differences, certain common factors contributed substantially to the economic development in the East Asian region. These, he argues, include the role and importance of support from United States of America (i.e. the US Aid to South Korea and Taiwan) and United Kingdom (support to Hong Kong's exports to the Commonwealth countries and securing of export quotas enhancing Hong Kong's penetration of the world markets). Other common factors are, according to Castells, included the outward orientation of these East Asian countries' economies, especially the export of manufactured goods; and the virtual absence of the rural, land owning class which he sees as the obstacle to development given the speculative nature of investments and reluctance to modernise in order to preserve social and cultural domination.

While the above accounts are helpful in so far as they bring to light the role of a whole range of other non-cultural factors in the growth and development of the East Asian region, a difficulty arises when culture's influence and role is completely dismissed and/or played down, as explained in Castell's work. This is particularly so as the evidence he presents points to unique culture influence. This can be seen from the active leading economic role that the state played in these countries (be it directing and managing foreign direct investments or technology transfer, or supporting local industry or cushioning the likely negative impact on citizens or burgeoning local businesses through comprehensive welfare interventions, or creating the necessary physical infrastructure for development) and the role of family investments in industrial development, as well as of homogeneous culture that justifies patriarchy and enhanced the reproduction of traditional values and work ethics in the workplace (This is not very much different to the findings by Ching (1997) that the workplace/production regimes in the Chinese firms or Chinese-run firms have a strong cultural logic). These are consistent with the Confucian values and personalist norms such as humaneness, harmony, reciprocity rule, thrift and self-reliance – and can be explained in terms of insights from Confucianism, which have a pivotal rationale in the East Asian countries for capital accumulation through personal/family savings and active state intervention as part of the nationalist project as well as the welfare system, the high public expenditure, and hard work ethics (Ayal, 1963; Zhan, 1988, O'Malley, 1988; and Chaibong, 1999).

That the Confucian culture played a positive economic role has also been acknowledged by Il Sakong (1993) in his account of the Korean economic development. According to Sakong while Korea had favourable initial conditions for development in the 1960s such as a literate and motivated workforce and the latent entrepreneurial energies; the actual positive economic effect of these was only realised when the new political leadership strongly committed to the nation's economic development, took over. This leadership, greatly influenced by the hierarchical Confucian culture not only played an active role in economic affairs but felt compelled to work towards achieving the desired growth and development (Sakong, 1993: 204). This, he argues, saw strong political leadership and commitment to the achievement of national priorities in a context of a society that upheld hierarchical loyalty and civil service. The state thus adopted the outward looking,

export-oriented approach in place of the old inward-looking, import-substitution approach, giving incentives to those industrial business enterprises involved in export activities and also providing them with the necessary information on export opportunities (Sakong, 1993). Sakong acknowledges, however, the equally significant role that non-cultural factors played by foreign capital, initially in the form of aid and later loans, foreign markets, liberal global system and stable financial environment, as well as imported foreign technology whose transfer was made easier by the outward-looking development strategy (Sakong, 1993: 208-211).

Confucian familism, marked by the transfer of the family values to the public realm such as in government or in the workplace, is helpful in explaining the active state-led economic strategy in the East Asian region. In fact Castells himself acknowledges this in the case of China where he found that *quanxi* networks played a crucial role in the country's global capitalist expansion despite his persistent denial of this fact. Note here his self-contradictory remarks:

"But this 'global capital' ... is administered ... by Chinese business networks, more often than based on family relationships, and inter-linked among themselves ... I have grown sceptical of cultural explanations about insider knowledge and personal connections. ... overseas Chinese business networks are indeed the main intermediaries between global capital, including overseas Chinese capital, and China's markets and producing/exporting sites. But the reason is not that they and their southern China partners both like steamed cod. It is because *China's multiple link to the global economy is local, that is it is performed through the connection between overseas Chinese business and local and provincial governments in china, the sui generis capitalist class that Hsing calls the 'bureaucratic entrepreneurs'.*"(Castells, 2000: 316-317)

However, due to his determination to dismiss culture-based accounts, inspite of the compelling evidence to the contrary, he is unable to explain the unique role of state intervention in these countries' economies. This is especially so with the emphasis attached to the need to advance the domestic, nationalist project which is consistent with the point made by Ayal and O'Malley that what enhances culture's economic relevance is its ability to enable people to set goals achievable through economic activity.

Also somewhat cautious but self-contradictory about the culture-based accounts of economic development, is Amartya Sen in his 2001 article entitled the “Asian values and economic growth” (Sen, 2001). In this article, Sen provides a seemingly cautious and ambiguous criticism of the view that rapid economic growth and development in the East Asian countries is attributable to the commonly shared Confucian value system and culture. While questioning these value-based accounts, Sen however admits that economic development in the East Asian region was characterised by some unique special features. Those features, include “a bigger role of education and skill formation, and the use of a more friendly – collaborative relation between the market and the state.” These, he argues however, are neither unique to the East Asian value system nor can other countries follow these with ease. This argument is clearly contradictory as, while conceding to the idea of the existence of some unique special features in the East Asian region, he simultaneously dismisses the same idea. This lands Sen on the same plane as Castells.

Sen's argument is based on the view that the value-based accounts of economic performance are both arbitrary and difficult to vindicate. This, he argues, is particularly so when industrial development first occurred in Europe and later in Japan (rather than the rest of East Asia) and attempts were made to provide value-based reasons. In the case of Japan, for instance, development was attributed to Japanese values and traditions such as martial Samurai heritage and family-centred business traditions. These accounts, he argues, were later dropped when China and other East Asian countries began to experience rapid economic growth leading to a shift towards the focus on the shared traditions and values of Confucianism in the East Asian region. A further challenge, which led to a weakening of the value-based explanations, according to Sen, arose from the subsequent economic developments in the South East Asian region comprised of countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and India, each of which have diverse value systems such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism but no Confucianism.

What distinguishes Sen from Castells though is that while he questions the value-based accounts of East Asian economic success in the light of the later developments in South East Asia, he does not completely dismiss the significance and relevance of such accounts and the lessons they provide. The contradictions and ambivalence in

Sen's analysis are visibly evident in the following argument he made with respect to the East Asian experiences:

"I think some important lessons have emerged, but these do not include anything as grand as the special fitness of Asian values to modern economic growth. The most important lesson here may be a negative one, i.e. that European culture is not the only road to modern success... We now know that other values work too – and often work better – and this is the lesson that has been emerging over the last century, beginning with Japan's remarkable economic progress" (Sen, 2001).

Interestingly, and seemingly confused by the debate on the relationship between Confucianism and economic dynamism, is Zurndorfer (2005) who advances a more or less similar analysis as Sen in his examination of the Chinese situation. He notes that there are two contrasting perspectives. One perspective is held by, amongst others, Eckstein and Fairbank (1960); Feuerwerker (1958); and Levy (1955) in the 1950s and 1960s and asserts that Confucianism is an impediment to economic development in China. The other one is led by, amongst others, Macfarquhar (1980) and Yu (1987) in from the 1980s to the present. It claims, for the contrary, that there is a positive connection between Confucianism and economy. Eckstein and Fairbank "characterised the Chinese economy in the early nineteenth century as being in a stage of 'traditional equilibrium' at which time 'minor growth, innovation and technological change may occur but ... not sufficient to break the rigid and inhibiting bonds of the traditional framework of social and economic institutions." In the 1980s Yu advanced the opposite argument that since the sixteenth century Confucian culture and philosophy "had filtered down through the structure of the society" with its values and ethics penetrating all social levels, including the merchant profession, thus helping to nurture "the triumph of successful business enterprise in China"(Zurndorfer, 2005: 2-9).

The renewed interest in Confucian values is found to be ironical by Zurndorfer (2005) as, he argues that in the 1950s and 1960s, the very same values were considered an impediment to modern economic transformation. Furthermore, Zurndorfer is critical of Yu's claim for its tendency to oversimplify what is in fact a complex history of Confucianism such as its condemnation of profit in the pursuit of moral improvement. Hence, "Yu's translation of the spirit-of-capitalism logic slights the Confucian



conception of economic morality which imposes limits on profit" (Zurndorfer, 2005:10). While Zurndorfer supports Yu's claim that Chinese merchants functioned within the institutional framework shaped by Confucian ethics, he raises doubts about just how benign their business activities were. He argues that they probably gambled, cheated, depended on fortune-tellers, treated their less-fortunate inferiors with contempt; and also that they might have been "unreliable, sloth, timid, selfish, and ostentatious". Zurndorfer (2005: 11) finds a major flaw in Yu's argument that the development of the merchant class was made possible by the Confucianism which, he argues, goes against the historical evidence which shows that Confucianism did not generate capitalism.

Ironically though, Zurndorfer, like Sen, finds some explanatory value in Yu's theory, especially in presenting a serious challenge to the hegemonic Euro-centric discourse of modernity and account of progress and development in the light of the East Asian region's economic modernisation and advancement. This 'counter-hegemonic self-assertiveness', he argues, is not only emancipatory but also binds "economic success with 'traditional' Confucian cultural values", especially those related to the family in the spheres of consumption and production such as the predominance of and significance attached to family firms. Here, he cites Wong(1988)'s argument that these family-organised firms, established through bringing together a wide range of related kin and pulling together of material and financial resources; are an incentive to multiply benefits to kin members. Contrary to this, Zurndorfer argues that Wong's analysis both "idealizes 'Confucian families' as the 'fuel of the motor of development' and challenges the modernization theory-inspired critique in the 1950s of the role of family in China's modernization as having been inhibitive rather than enhancing (Zurndorfer: 2005, 13-15).

It is clear that although value-based or culture-based accounts are being questioned in the light of the recognition of the role of non-cultural factors said to have positively influenced the economic development in the East Asian and South East Asian countries, the role and significance of cultural values, in enhancing development, and in particular the Confucian values, cannot go unnoticed nor be underplayed and wished away. This point is also evident in the recent study by Heidi Dahles (2004) in which she examines the business investment strategies employed by Singaporean-



Chinese businessmen in China and other places. In her study, Dahles (2004) found that the first generation Singaporean-Chinese businessmen's investment strategies were largely influenced and enhanced by the Confucian cultural value system which promotes harmony and consensus, trust and responsibilities towards the lineage. Those strategies were characterised by co-operation within ethnic Chinese business networks which helped to strengthen business relations amongst ethnic Chinese. This, she argues, led to Chinese capitalism being described as 'network capitalism' characterised by hierarchical relationships within the family and a systems of reciprocal relationships known as *guanxi* (Dahles, 2004: 6).

Drawing from Hamilton (1996)'s institutional theory, Dahles argues that the role of business networks is to provide an institutional environment or what is referred to as 'institutional thickness' supportive of co-operative business relations and strategies. In the context of the Chinese business networks, such institutional thickness was enhanced "by the strong cultural and social embeddedness of economic activities in personal relationships (*guanxi*), high levels of personal and social interaction amongst actors in those networks, collective representation through trade and commercial associations and informal business groupings, and the quest for mutual benefits by which all parties in a network gain through co-operation" (Dahles, 2004: 8-9). Dahles calls these strategies used by the first generation Singaporean-Chinese businessmen "the conventional diasporic investment strategies" through which the Chinese dialect was used for communication and for making a traditional outlook on both life and business, as well as to run family-owned business in patriarchal ways.

According to Dahles's study, the *guanxi*-based business networks have since been extended beyond the family level into relationships with government. This resulted in the state becoming the vital player in Chinese businesses through the creation of markets, facilitation of technology transfer, construction of networks, provision of research and development facilities, offering of tenders and replacement of family dependence with dependence on the state's support. The state also promoted Confucian values in its relationship with citizens while discouraging Westernisation of life (Dahles, 2004: 23). This is clearly in line with Hahm (1999)'s assertion, as outlined in the early sections of this chapter, that in Confucian culture, no distinction

is drawn between the public and the private spheres of life, and hence that the family is a training ground for public responsibilities.

Dahles argues, however, that while the first generation Chinese businessmen used the conventional strategy, there is today a new trend amongst second and third generations marked by a shift away from this strategy towards what she calls the “hybrid” and the “new type” of strategies<sup>1</sup>. This shift, she argues, is noticeable in the preference amongst the Chinese businessmen to establish business relations and go into business partnerships on the basis of mutual interests as opposed common ethnic identity. Hence that Singaporean-Chinese businessmen are driven by capitalist reasoning which has led to them searching for new markets, product diversification and low-cost production sites as well as to establish co-operative ventures with private firms, state-owned companies and MNCs overseas based on mutual interest (Dahles, 2004: 24).

Other signals of this shift, Dahles argues, include the dwindling role of the family in the running of businesses as funds are sourced from outside the family i.e. from amongst friends and colleagues; the decline in patriarchal influences over business; business training no longer being obtained from within the family but from foreign business schools offering MBA programmes resulting in the younger generation of Singaporean-Chinese applying to their businesses the Western based knowledge acquired from such training programmes; and the joining of professional associations. In fact, Dahles argues that amongst these later generations of Singaporean-Chinese businessmen, none mentions moral and sentimental ties with mainland China as the main reason for investing in China.

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<sup>1</sup> Dahles describes the ‘new’ strategy as being used by “young Western-educated Singaporeans who strategically employ their foreign contacts to enter into business ventures in a myriad of foreign countries” and the ‘hybrid type’ as being used by “the MNC-subcontractor who expands business abroad by following their contractor, while at the same time benefiting from *quanxi*-based relations with family and government”. She argues that there is a competition between the application of family, ethnically-based forms of business organisation and the forms of organisation informed by knowledge acquired from foreign training institutions (See Dahles, 2004: 13 and 26).

Interestingly, while Dahles identifies these new shifts and trends, she argues that even in those new strategies, and in particular the prominent hybrid strategy, *quanxi* remains crucial in business deals and trans-border investments. She argues that while there is competition between the two emerging strategies i.e. the ‘new’ and the ‘hybrid type’, it is however worth noting that both the professional, formal approaches and the personal, ethnically-based approaches to business are occurring in the context of *quanxi*. This provides the institutional thickness characteristic of the Chinese business networks, and is well captured in her following argument:

“For the time being, the hybrid trans-border strategy, an empirical manifestation of the institutional perspective, seems to be the most prominent and at the same time most successful trans-border strategy of second and third generation ethnic Chinese businesses. These businesses benefit from family capital, the knowledge and networks generated by (foreign) tertiary education, and the new investment opportunities promoted by a supportive state or by MNC-related ventures. Instead of a transition from affection-based to profit-oriented and state-led strategies ... there is an accumulation of resources that became available to the Singapore Chinese in the course of the colonial and post-colonial development of the city-state. The multi-layered strategy emerging from the situational use of these resources fits the Singaporean business culture best as it entails the maximization of *quanxi* relations. Actually it represents a perfect marriage between capitalism, culture and the political entrepreneurship of the Singapore state.” (Dahles, 2004: 26-27)

In the light of the review above, and avoiding reductionist argument; I find Sakong (1993)’s account, which acknowledges the complementary significance of a wide range of factors (both cultural and non-cultural) in the East Asian economic development much more helpful than some of the others or have addressed. The factors which Sakong identifies include the role of the state, conducive international trade environment, foreign trade, foreign direct investments and foreign capital as well as the Confucian cultural values. As he points out, challenging those critical of the role of the Confucian cultural heritage as being a hindrance to economic development, the heritage’s positive role is best enhanced where other key complementary factors are present such as the strong leadership commitment as was the case in Korea’s development (Sakong, 1993: 205).

## **Concluding remarks**

While the review of the literature on the economic experiences in the East Asian and South East Asian regions in this chapter has elucidated contrasting accounts of the rapid economic growth and development in the above regions, it has also presented strong evidence in support of the view that societal cultural value systems played a vital, hard-to-ignore role in the region's economic development. It was however noted, and as was emphasised by Ayal and O'Malley, that for the cultural value system to fulfil an economic role, it has to contain within it the virtues and values that have economic and developmental relevance i.e. Ayal's propensities. This view is clearly supported by evidence that arose from the experiences of the East Asian countries and the influence of the commonly shared Confucian-based value system containing values promoting collective and co-operative team effort in economic and/or business activities, diligence when performing work, and capital and wealth accumulation through savings and investments. Such values included frugality, thrift, familism, respect, loyalty, and self-reliance.

Ching's study of the Chinese firms both in Hong Kong and Shenzhen has, for instance, shown how the societal cultural values and practices, mainly anchored in the Confucian culture, influenced relationships in the workplace as well as attitudes towards work. Such influence manifested itself through socially-constructed workplace (gender) identities which legitimised low wages and non-promotion of women workers, workers' acceptance of unilateral managerial authority and virtual absence of regulatory legislative environment for protection of workers' rights and interests, stable working relations, and self-discipline amongst the workers leading to enhanced work performance and productivity. This occurred in a context whereby both management and workers understood and identified with the commonly shared Confucian cultural values which they integrated into their daily workplace lives and activities. This reinforces Hahm's view that in the East Asian countries, family, as a socialisation agency, serves as training ground for responsibilities outside of the family such as in the workplace and in government.

It should nevertheless be noted that while a cultural value system with economically relevant values is no doubt essential for economic development, its economic role is enhanced best where there is supportive institutional environment and the economic actors (e.g. workers and business managers as social cultural agents) who identify with and live those cultural values in their daily interactions. Thus such values should formulate an active part of day to day life in the workplace and in relationships between societal institutions such as state agencies and business enterprises. *Quanxi* in the East Asian countries informed state interventions that were necessary to facilitate the smooth and efficient running of businesses through, for instance, the allocation and investment of resources in productive sectors such as education and the creation of vital markets for local businesses.

From Ching's study of factory cultures we learn about the problems which may accrue from the harnessing of traditional cultural values into modern capitalist economic activities as working relations. As Ching shows the effect of this was to generate acute inequalities, benefiting some while disadvantaging others. Ching's study shows just how Confucian-based values led, on the one hand, to securing increased commitment workers, stable production relations, and improved performance and productivity; and on the other, to stagnation of living standards and working conditions for workers through legitimisation of gender inequalities in the workplace, low wages, management unilateralism, and non-recognition of trade unions leaving workers unprotected. This highlights the cultural manipulative tendencies on the part of those in positions of authority such as management and political leaders as was noted from the experiences in South Africa (refer to chapter 4).

## **Chapter Three**

### **Perspectives on African Traditional Cultures and Value Systems: Are they Relevant to Progress and Development? Implications for Botho / Ubuntu Culture in South Africa**

“We could assimilate mathematics or the French language, but we could never strip off our black skins nor root out our black souls” (Senghor, 1963, quoted in English and Kalumba, 1996: 50).

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter provides a critical review of the literature on the role and the relevance of African traditional cultures and value systems to progress and development. This is done with the view to creating a broader continental framework for the subsequent analysis and examination of the role that the indigenous African culture of ubuntu or botho could play in the economic development in South Africa. An interest to study and seek to understand the nature of the African cultures and/or value systems and their relationship and relevance to the economy grew in the period following the end of colonialism, a period in which intellectual energies were geared towards finding workable models and strategies for reconstruction and development of the formerly colonised African countries as well as for ending of the legacy of colonial subjugation and exploitation. As Kwame Gyekye pointed out, the post-colonial era not only signified an end to “...the period of dictation, forcible imposition of a variety of alien values and institutions, ... (but also) a period of autonomous self-expressions on the part of the formerly colonized people, as well as of self-assertion, sober reflection on values and goals, and the gradual weaning away from the self-flagellating aspects of colonial mentality acquired through decades of coloniality” (Gyekye, 1997: 25). However, for Gyekye, this period does not only signify the total rejection of the entire colonial heritage by the formerly colonised, but also the voluntary selection of those aspects of the heritage considered worthwhile and conducive to development.

It is within this framework in which the formerly colonised African countries sought self-expression, self-assertion and reflection on their values and goals that the debates on the economic and developmental role of their traditional cultural values ensued. As will be noticed from the literature review on the subject of the African traditional values systems and/or cultures and their relevance to economy and development, varying conflicting perspectives and accounts have been developed and advanced. It is on the basis of the critical review of those perspectives and accounts that I will provide an assessment that will inform my later analysis and examination of the



economic relevance and role that the African culture and value system of ubuntu could play in the contemporary South African society.

### **3.2. Review of Literature and Debates**

Within the debates, there is a perspective which holds the view that African traditional cultures and/or value systems, unlike the Western ones, are inhibitive to and incompatible with scientific, technological, economic, and philosophical development and progress (Gyeke, 1997; Horton, 1982 and 1997). Gyeke attributes this incompatibility to the “intensely religious and spiritual nature of African traditional life”, which he argues, has discouraged an expansion of existing practical knowledge of crafts and technologies such as those used for food preservation and herbal therapeutics through scientific enquiry and analysis, which eventually stunted the growth of sciences (Gyeke, 1997: p.27). He, for instance, argues that while African cultures appreciated the notion of causality, which is crucial in scientific inquiry and explanation of natural phenomena, their religiosity led to explaining causality in terms of spirits and mystical powers. This, he argues, resulted in empirical causal accounts being abandoned and neglected in favour of religious-inspired accounts<sup>1</sup>. The latter accounts, Gyeke argues, tend to see spirits or mystical powers as causal factors.

Another stumbling to the development of science and technology within the African cultures identified by Gyeke is that of the manner in which knowledge of external world has been acquired. He argues that unlike in science, knowledge acquisition was not based on experimentation but was personalised through a strong element of secrecy. This resulted in such knowledge not being made available for further objective, public scrutiny and analysis in order to verify its conclusions. This veil of secrecy around it, Gyeke argues, results in the possessed knowledge simply vanishing on the death of its bearers. He illustrates this point by making specific reference to the knowledge of potencies of herbs and other medicinal plants possessed by African traditional healers. Considering this knowledge as the most secretive of them all, he argues “even if the claims made by African medicine men and women of having discovered cures for deadly diseases could be substantiated scientifically, those claims

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<sup>1</sup> Gyeke (1997: 28) refers to empirical causal explanations as “empirical causation” as they ask what- and how- questions, and religious-inspired accounts as “agentive causation” which ask who- and why- question.

cannot be pursued for verification, since their knowledge-claims were esoteric and personal. The desire to make knowledge of the external world personal has been the characteristic attitude of our traditional healers. In the past, all such possibly credible claims to knowledge of medicinal plants just evaporated on the death of the traditional healer or priest. And science, including the science of medicine, stagnated.” (Gyeke, 1997: 29)

It should however be noted that while Gyeke is critical of what he considers a lack of drive to pursue sustained scientific enquiry into knowledge of the natural world and lack of desire for knowledge for its own sake, he however acknowledges the existence and presence of technological and scientific capacity within African societies and their cultures or value systems. He mainly attributes lack of drive to unlock and exercise that capacity on a sustained basis to the mindset often expressed in statements such as “this is what the ancestors said or did” or the maxims such as the Ghanaian Akan one that says “if you insist on probing deeply into the eye sockets of a dead person, you see a ghost” (this is an English translation) which says that curiosity or deep probing could result in dreadful consequences (Gyeke, 1997: 30-31). Such maxims, Gyeke argues quoting Laing, stunt the spirit of inquiry, exploration and adventure.

Gyeke’s view that African traditional cultures or value systems are inhibitive to scientific growth, development and progress is shared by Robin Horton. Horton (1997), drawing distinctions between the African traditional cultures and Western scientific cultures, refers to the former as “closed” cultures and the latter as “open” cultures. By “closed” cultures or thought systems, he is referring to those cultures in which there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the existing, established theories or beliefs. In contrast, the “open” cultures are those that have a highly developed awareness of such alternatives (Horton, 1997: 327). For Horton, an obstacle to progress within the African traditional cultures lies in their reluctance to question the established beliefs owing to the fear that any threat to those beliefs could result in a horrific chaos (Horton, 1997: 333).

This point was also echoed in Wiredu's comparative analysis of the African (traditional/folk) thought and the Western (traditional/folk) thought systems. Wiredu (1980) argues that any culture and/or thought system which is both non-scientific and non-literate (be it Western or African), is seriously handicapped. This, he argues, is so since scientific methods can only occur where there is a recording of precise measurements, calculations, and observational data i.e. where there is what he calls the scientific spirit and/or the spirit of rational inquiry (Wiredu, 1980:41).

He argues, based on his examination of the conception of a person by the Akan people of Ghana, which he found to be more interesting and imaginative than the Western philosopher's thesis, that while (such) folk thought could be comprehensive and interesting, the lack of discursive content in it remains a major drawback. Hence that, unlike the modern Western philosopher, who argues for his/her thesis, clarifies meanings, and responds to objections, the believer in traditional and/or folk thought usually respond like this: "this is what our ancestors said". Such response, Wiredu argues, only serves to block opportunities for further development. It is perhaps ironical and self-contradictory for Wiredu to make this kind of comparison between the Akans (traditional/folk people) and the modern Western philosophers, as he repeatedly condemns and dismisses tendencies by Western anthropologists to make similar kind of comparisons. Wiredu considers such comparisons to be not only unfortunate and unfair, but also as having led to misleading conclusions about the differences between the peoples of Africa and those of the West. His critique is best reflected in the following argument:

"...instead of seeing the basic non-scientific characteristics of African traditional thought as typifying traditional thought in general, Western anthropologists and others besides have mistakenly tended to take them as defining a peculiarly African way of thinking, with unfortunate effects... one such effects is that the really interesting cross-cultural comparisons of modes of thought have rarely been made. If one starts with the recognition that each nation has some background of traditional thought – and remember by *traditional* thought that here I mean pre-scientific thought of the type that tends to construct explanations of natural phenomena in terms of the activities of gods and spirits - then the interesting and anthropologically illuminating comparison will be to see in what different ways the belief in spirits is employed by various peoples in the attempt to achieve a coherent view of the world. In such specific differences will consist the real peculiarities of African traditional thought in

contradiction to, say, Western traditional thought ... In the absence of any such realisation, what has generally happened is that not only the genuine distinguishing features of African traditional thought but also its basic non-scientific tendencies have been taken as a basis for contrasting Africans and Western peoples. One consequence is that many Westerners have gone about with an exaggerated notion of the differences in nature between Africans and the people of the West...

... my point is that they (i.e. *backward beliefs*) are not African in any intrinsic, inseparable sense; and the least that African philosophers and foreign well-wishers can do in this connection is to refrain ... from serving up the usual cogeries of unargued conceptions about gods, ghosts and witches in the name of African philosophy. Such a description is highly unfortunate. If at all deserving of the name 'philosophy', these ideas should be regarded not as a part of African philosophy simply, but rather as a part of *traditional* African philosophy." (Wiredu, 1980: 39 and 45-46)

Notwithstanding this, Wiredu however acknowledges that, although rational knowledge is not the preserve of the modern West just in the same way as superstition is not peculiar to Africans, the fact is that Africa lags behind the West in terms of the degree to which the scientific spirit and the rational spirit of inquiry has been developed. Wiredu thus argues that, for Africa to develop the spirit of rational inquiry in all spheres of thought and belief, Africans should urgently rid themselves of those backward aspects of customs and only retain the progressive ones essential for and relevant to development. Wiredu, however, notes that despite this lag in the spirit of rational inquiry in Africa when compared with the West, there is within the traditional African thinking some presence of the principle of rational evidence (Wiredu, 1980: 41, 43, 45). Hence, his argument:

"...no society could survive for any length of time without basing a large part of its daily activities on beliefs derived from the evidence. You cannot farm without some rationally based knowledge of soils, seeds and climate; and no society can achieve any reasonable degree of harmony in human relations without the basic ability to assess claims and allegations by the methods of objective investigation." (Wiredu, 1980: 42)

Wiredu's proposed solution for Africa is shared and upheld by Gyeke (1997), who argues that for the above obstacles to be overcome and thus unlock the scientific and technological potential of African countries, it is essential that Africans develop an understanding of scientific principles through the knowledge of physics, metallurgy,

biology and chemistry. He sees this as being essential for establishing a strong scientific base which would encourage the asking of what- and how- questions, and hence the use of empirical causation as opposed to agentive causation in explaining technological and natural processes. He argues that although African cultures display the presence of indigenous technological capacities within them, those capacities could not be fully developed and expanded due to the lack of understanding and application of scientific principles. To illustrate this point, he cites a few cases which include that of the Ghanaian motor mechanic and a woman food technologist. The Ghanaian mechanic, who was working on the engine adjusting the contact breaker point in the car distributor, was found to be doing so using only his sense of sight and refusing to use technical aids such as the feeler gauge. His refusal to use technical aids, Gyeke argues, which was not peculiar to him but could also be found amongst other mechanists is rooted in the broader societal culture.

Such culturally entrenched attitude towards technical aids, he argues, not only deprives mechanists the benefits of achieving precision measurement for proper maintenance of the machines but also impedes opportunities of further growth and improvement of technology. Similarly, he argues, the woman food technologist in Ghana was found to be practicing technology with some limited insight of scientific principles. The woman in question was processing “fante kenkey” which Gyeke describes as a fermented cereal dumpling made from maize dough. He argues that while this woman displayed a high level of competency and knowledge in terms of handling the processing efficiently in terms of time and the material used to achieve desired outcomes, a knowledge clearly rooted in basic and applied scientific principles; she however could not explain and articulate those principles (Gyeke, 1997: 35- 36).

Gyeke thus argues that this and what seems to be the thinking amongst African technology practitioners that the what- and how- questions do not matter in the application and practice of technology, whereby technology is meant to only resolve practical problems of survival, necessitate an urgent need for change in such attitude towards knowledge. In his view, such a change in attitude would make the possessed knowledge of technology exoteric and accessible to the public for scrutiny, thus releasing knowledge from mysticism or spirituality. For Gyeke, the significance of

such scrutiny lies in the fact that it could result in the existing knowledge being rejected or amended or confirmed.

The new intellectual attitude, together with the understanding of scientific principles and the resultant strong scientific base, is according to Gyeke, essential if the African countries are to fully exploit and adapt transferred technologies from the developed world to their own local conditions and to meet their needs. Hence, that this would enhance the *appropriation* of technology characterized by “the active, adroit, and purposeful initiative and participation of the recipients in the pursuit and acquisition of a technology of foreign production.”(Gyeke, 1997: 41) This would, in his view, not only prevent Africans from becoming permanently dependent on technology transfer but also enable them to ensure that the choice and application of technology transfer is guided by local principles and needs. His argument is based on the acknowledgement and recognition that technology is developed within specific cultural frameworks to meet certain needs. Hence that as a cultural product, technology transfer constitutes cultural borrowing, and therefore requires an active and adroit approach by the recipient in order to avoid a negative impact on local values and ways of life and ensure maximum benefit from it (Gyeke, 1997: 38-42). Thus, although he argues for the separation of cultural values and religious beliefs from scientific, technological world; Gyeke however believes that both can still co-exist to ensure that technology is socio-economically beneficial while not undermining highly regarded cultural values.

While the above perspective on African traditional cultures and value systems highlights some vital points and issues that need careful consideration when exploring the socio-economic role of African cultures in the contemporary era of globalization, it however elicited a response which led to counter arguments that challenge and in some cases dismiss those arguments expressed in it. Counter arguments have also exposed some serious conceptual problems and dangers in this perspective’s assertion that unlike the Western knowledge systems, African traditional cultures and knowledge systems are pervasively mystical, nostalgic and lack dynamism (i.e. discourage any deviation from original, authentic past) as well as scientific and conceptual content, and in turn impede progress.



Note, for instance, the review and critique by Jean- Marie Makang (1997) of the view held by Placide Tempels, a Belgian missionary in the former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), of the indigenous African people and their traditional cultures. Through his “philosophy of *Ntu*” or “ontology of participation” or “Bantu ontology”, Makang argues, Tempels advanced the view that the real authentic Bantu tradition is that which has not departed from its source but had kept its original purity and innocence (Makang, 1997: 326). This view is premised on Tempels’ perception of the Bantu mentality as captured in the expression “the source is pure, but waters are polluted” (a quote from Eboussi in Makang, 1997: 326). Informed by this perception and his Bantu ontology, Makang argues that Tempels’ went on to draw distinctions between what he called the “bush people” or “authentic Bantu” and the “Europeanized Bantu” or “modern Bantu”. In that distinction, Tempels considered the “Modern Bantu” as those Africans who have been corrupted by European materialism and lost their authenticity and the sense of the old, ageless, wisdom of the ancestors as well as everything stable in Bantu tradition. In contrast, the “bush people” are, for Tempel, the real authentic Bantu as they are not spoiled by European modernity and are vital in preserving the authentic Bantu culture (Makang, 1997: 327).

Makang is however critical of the failure of Tempels’ ontology to recognize the evolutionary, dynamic nature of African traditions. He argues that this discourse is unhistorical as it constantly regrets the disappearance of the past by reducing African traditions to a fixed past and to the nostalgia of an original state, thus stripping the African people of their historicity (Makang, 1997: 236 – 237). He thus sees Tempels’ praise of the “bush people” or “authentic Bantu” as amounting to nothing but the “praise of the past over the present, of archaism over the and against progress, of the good soul over and against technical and material improvement”. Hence, that Tempels’ nostalgic tradition of “what ceased to be is not a living reality, but a dead tradition” (Makang, 1997:327). Rather, and in contrast to Tempels’ and those upholding this ethnological discourse of African people and their traditions, Makang argues that what Tempels’ saw as a degeneration of a “true, authentic” African tradition, whereby irrelevant elements to the modern world were abandoned, was in fact a signal of the dynamic nature of those Africans and their ability to adapt their traditions to the changes in time and space or changing historical contexts. Hence that such an ability to adapt to new situations is critical to survival of traditions and their



enrichment through learning from other traditions and assimilation of some relevant elements thereof, and also that it signifies flexibility of the African people and their traditions (Makang, 1997: 328).

A further criticism leveled at this perspective was directed at its tendency to draw dichotomies such as “open/closed” and “modern/traditional”, whereby the West is seen as having open and modern societies and Africa as having closed and traditional societies. Peter Amato (1997) is one of those in the forefront advancing this criticism. In his article entitled “African philosophy and modernity”, Amato dismisses such dichotomies within the Western intellectual thought as simply rhetorical and having a tendency to both undermine African philosophy while allowing Western culture to subsume others in a “homogenous, self-serving narrative” (Amato, 1997: 75). The main pitfall of this discourse, he argues, is its failure to acknowledge the role and contribution that different intellectual cultures may play in producing overlapping conceptualizations of social reality and human nature. Hence, that there is a need for a shift from putative universal horizon to differentiated horizons of different cultures and writers, which allows for a mutually free discourse (Amato, 1997: 75).

Arguing for a multi-cultural or inter-cultural intellectual approach, Amato (1997) further dismisses the view that religious-inspired ideas and accounts of social reality are necessarily regressive. On the contrary, he argues, philosophical reason is not independent of mythic or religious life of the people. He thus sees this view as likely to perpetuate the stereotypes towards other intellectual discourses, while simultaneously upholding the Western intellectual discourse’s claims of understanding the direction that human history should take. Hence the tendency to measure the success of societies categorized as traditional or pre-modern on the basis of their ability to follow similar path of development as the West i.e. scientific progress, technological administration, and capitalism as the advanced stage of human development. What he terms “European self-described modernity” (Amato, 1997: 74).

Amato’s argument that philosophical reason is not independent of mythic/religious life of people and criticism of Horton’s open/closed or traditional/modern dichotomy is upheld by Barry Hallen (1996) on the basis of the findings from his interview with the Nigerian Yoruba herbal doctor he simply calls Chief Z. In advancing his critique

of Horton's claims, Hallen employs Karl Popper's thesis of the criteria which could be used to assess whether or not, the thought system is reflective and critical. According to Popper, whom Hallen argues, believes that traditional thoughts are essentially non-critical, the appropriate criterion would be to identify the following three aspects or stages within the thought system:

- People's ability to identify tradition simply as a tradition,
- Their awareness of the functional significance of the tradition to their day-to-day living and activities, and
- Awareness of at least one significant alternative to the tradition, and on some critical basis then can choose to reaffirm or not reject it (see Hallen, 1996: 219).

Hallen argues that Chief Z's responses to the interview on indigenous herbal practice satisfied all of these three stages, thus that there is criticality and reflectivity within the traditional Yoruba thought. In his response, Chief Z told Hallen that although he and other herbalists know very well that patients are actually cured and healed by the potency of the medical herbs they prescribe to them based on their specialist knowledge, they are careful not to attribute the effectiveness of the herbs to their potencies and their own insight about the herb, but to some divine powers known as *orisa*. Hallen found out during his research that the Yoruba people believe strongly in the *orisa* as their protector and guardian as well as source of power and wisdom, and thus have to show allegiance to this divine force/s. Hence that in their *orisa* worship, the Yoruba believe that one's skill and successes should be attributable that individual but to the divine agency which is *orisa* (Hallen, 1996: 221). Failure to attribute the patients' recovery and healing to *orisa*, Chief Z argued, could have detrimental consequences for the herbalist such as development of jealousy and envy from amongst the member of the community as well as detesting of the herbalist's perceived pride. Thus, making reference to *orisa* helps to deflect and discourage of all these.

Another advantage highlighted by Chief Z in response to Hallen's interview questions was that mentioning *orisa* in prescriptions helps to conceal common sense element always associated with remedies and thus getting patients to take herbalist's advice

and prescriptions seriously, with good outcomes in terms of recovery from ailments. These responses, Hallen argues, not only reveal Chief Z recognition and appreciation of the functional significance of traditional beliefs to the herbal practice and to the community, but also satisfy all of Popper's three criteria. Contrary to Horton's claim that in traditional societies (which he characterizes as having no developed awareness of alternative world views) people are non-critical and non-reflective, Hallen argues that it is possible even in the contexts of a single world-view to have significant critical and reflective powers. This is well captured in his argument as quoted below:

"It may well be the case that many societies that are classified as 'traditional' contain different and competitive ideological groups that are normally kept in relative balance. Some of these groups...are in a position to develop significant and rival powers of critical awareness."  
(Hallen, 1996: 222)

This line of view held by, for instance Amato and Hallen, is also shared by other later contributors to the debate on African traditional cultures and value systems, whose analyses not only present a further challenge to the view that traditional African thought and cultural systems are incompatible with the science and progress, but also introduced a different dimension to the debate. Note here the contribution by Sogolo (1998) in his examination of the nature and function of explanatory models and the notion of causality in traditional African thought systems in which he employed a qualified use of the Horton (1970) concepts of "primary" and "secondary" theories or levels of thought. For Horton, "primary theory" level of thought is characterized by common sense explanation of day-to-day events by layman and "secondary theory" level of thought is characterized by theoretical explanation involving hidden mechanisms unsusceptible to observational language (quoted in Sogolo, 1998: 178).

Subscribing to the view that a single event and phenomenon in the society can invoke different but complementary and non-mutually exclusive explanations, Sogolo dismisses the tendencies by Horton and other theorists to classify the traditional African thought systems, on the one hand, as constituting a primary theoretical level of thought, and on the other, the Western thought systems as constituting a secondary thought level. Rather, he argues, the explanatory models provided by both the traditional African and the Western thought systems have common features in their

approach. For instance, he argues that while there are tendencies to refer to conceptions of illnesses that appeal to supernatural forces as animistic, those with such tendencies fail to realize that conceptions like these are common in the history of every society. This, he argues, can be seen in the case of Scotland's early medical practice whereby "healing lay in propitiating the powers (supernatural) against which the patient might have offended." (Sogolo, 1998: 182 quoting from Clough, 1981: 183) Such accounts, he argues, are improved when scientific principles are uncovered to provide scientifically-based accounts.

Sogolo thus argues, like Wiredu, that the accounts provided in traditional African thought fall into both primary and secondary categories just like is the case with the Western thought explanatory models. Hence that accounts in these categories of thought levels, rather than being in conflict as Horton suggests, are in fact complementary and non-mutually exclusive. He argues that this non-mutual exclusivity and complementary nature is often missed despite the fact that the connections between the accounts are often difficult to deny. He illustrates the complementary nature of the accounts (i.e. primary and secondary) provided in both traditional African thought explanatory models and Western thought explanatory models by citing an example of causes of illnesses and methods or approaches used to heal them. He argues that in traditional African thought, causes of illnesses fall into both the primary and secondary categories.

To illustrate this, he makes a specific reference to the relationship between stress and human body's natural resistance to illnesses. He argues that while the traditional African thought and the Western thought have different conceptions of stress<sup>2</sup>, they however both acknowledge and agree that stress reduces the body's ability to resist illnesses. Hence that in both thought systems, when seeking to heal or cure such illnesses, priority will be given to the adoption of an integrated approach whereby both medication (e.g. herbs or drugs) and stress relieving techniques are used in order to facilitate healing and recovery from illness. Sogolo further illustrates the parallels

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<sup>2</sup> Sogolo (1998:183) argues that in traditional African thought, stress is attributed to factors such as strained relationship either with one's spiritual agents or with other persons within one's community. In contrast, in the Western thought, and citing an example of a business executive, he argues, he/she could suffer from stress due to the imminent collapse of business, a heavy load of a day's work, or anxiety over possible contingencies.

in integrated approaches in both traditional African medical practice and Western medical practice in his argument that:

“The well known *placebo* in orthodox medicine, in which confidence and positive belief – on the part either of the physician or the patient – produce a favourable effect, is well-nigh indistinguishable from the dual-approach of the African healer. Belief, here, must be distinguished from the mere unquestioning faith of the religious type. It has a psychological overtone which leads to physically effective results. Both in African and modern medicine, the patients’ belief that the physician is competent, and that the drug works, helps to restore his/her body to a state of harmony with the applied drug. Psychological states, attitudes, and beliefs have been known to play significant roles in traditional African medicine; they now provide acceptable explanations for some of the ailments that have in the past been attributed mainly to supernatural forces.” (Sogolo, 1998: 183-184)

Sogolo’s view that the traditional African medical conception of illnesses is different from that in the Western medical practices but common in approach, and that the primary and secondary accounts are complementary and non-mutually exclusive, is shared by Sertima (1999). This can be noted when he argues that while African medical practice is characterized by knowledge of plant science, anesthetics, antiseptics, vaccination, and advanced surgical techniques; it however also has a element of ritual and magic. Sertima’s view is based on the observation by Finch, a medical doctor at the Morehouse School of Medicine, that:

“Traditional medical practice is intimately acquainted with the psychic, social and cultural nuances of the patients” and that “... the traditional African doctor is often an expert psychotherapist, achieving results with his patients that conventional Western psychotherapy cannot” and that “The use of suggestion and hypnosis and the placebo, in addition to internal and external treatment,..., is becoming more and more appreciated in Western medicine.”(Sertima, 1999: 326)

The view that African traditional cultures are not conducive to development and progress is also challengeable in the light of the research outcomes which point to an evidence of scientific and technological progress in pre-colonial Africa. One such evidence is presented by Sertima (1999) in his outline of a wide range of technologies developed in different parts of pre-colonial Africa. Those scientific technologies included amongst others the carbon steel-making industrial sites on the Western

shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania and the neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda; the astronomical observatory in Kenya; a complex knowledge of astronomy amongst the Dogon people in West Africa – the Republic of Mali; the use of mathematical knowledge in the Congo (former Zaire) and amongst the Yoruba farmers and traders in the city of Benin in Nigeria; massive architectural stone structures such as the Great Zimbabwe and Egyptian pyramids; boat making technology in West and Central Africa and the use of nautical science in the Sahara desert; agricultural crop and cattle-rearing science; knowledge of medicines and herbs; and the systems of communication and writing (for details refer to Sertima, 1999).

Not only does the evidence of these technologies present a challenge to the views held by Horton and others about African traditional cultures, but also counters those accounts advanced to explain the historical failure and inability to further develop, expand and sustain these technologies. Those counter accounts effectively challenge Horton and others' blaming of the "regressive deeply religious, secretive and unscientific" nature of African traditional cultures and thought systems for having inhibited the further expansion of the founded technologies. Central to those counter accounts, is the argument that Africa's capacity to develop and progress was disrupted and interrupted by European colonial expansion which resulted in the subjugation and domination of the indigenous traditional practices, economies and institutions of the colonized world. Note for instance remarks by Magubane (1999) on the destructive impact of European colonialism on the colonized world, which he argues, contributed significantly to the European Renaissance:

"It was during the era of the high Renaissance that the pattern of the entire history of Europe's devastation and exploitation of the world was set through the Crusades and the so-called voyages of discovery in search of Eastern spices." (Magubane, 1999: 17)

Further:

"...To remember all this is to ponder the nature of Western civilisation ushered by the Renaissance and celebrated by the Enlightenment philosophers. Unless we remember this, we shall understand very of the contemporary world. How can we forget that European capitalists appropriated everything in Africa they could lay their greedy hands on – the continent's able-bodied labour, which they systematically drained away for their own purposes for the better



part of 500 years, and, in the imperial period, Africa's natural and human resources which they still control? Who can forget the looted cultural resources of Africa, like the treasures of Egypt and Ife bronze sculptures, now scattered in their museums and priceless collections? Even worse, they stole our history and our humanity by propagating their racist ideas. The destruction of the humanity of the African, the European belief in white supremacy, was more degrading than anything else. Nothing is more injurious to human relationships than for one group of people to have absolute power over others, as the white world had over Africa and its people." (Magubane, 1999: 30)

To further emphasize the point, Magubane went on to quote Churchill's statement on how Britain benefited from colonizing the West Indies:

"Our possession of the West Indies ... gave us the strength, the support, but especially the capital, wealth, at a time when no other European nation possessed such a reserve, which enabled us to come through the great struggle of the Napoleonic Wars, the keen competition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and enabled us .. to lay the foundations of that commercial and financial leadership which enabled us to make our great position in the world." (Magubane, 1999: 30, quoted from Peter Fryer, 1993: 11)

Another dimension to this debate on traditional African cultures, which further supports Sogolo's analysis, arises from the creolist perspective advanced by amongst others Ulf Hannerz (1970). In terms of this perspective, the growing contact between people with different cultural experiences owing to movements around the globe under globalisation, has an impact that changes the previously self-contained national cultures. This contact, he argues, results in cultures ceasing to be stable and coherent systems and rather becoming cultural 'work' in progress (see Hannerz, 1997:14). Hence, it would be misleading to treat culture/s within complex differentiated societies as simply homogenous and coherent. This process of change undergone by national cultures has been described by Hannerz and others as "creolization" and that it results in creole cultures i.e. those cultures that draw from two or more widely different historical sources (Hannerz, 1997: 14).

Hannerz (1997) also attributes the emergence of cultural complexity to the role of "cultural apparatus"; a term he adopts from C Wright Mills (1963), which he argues arises from division of labour with the society. Some examples of cultural apparatus are formal education, the mass media, the arts, sports and religion which, he argues,



are often used by the relative few to control the flow of meanings the many with the society (Hannerz, 1997). Citing education as example, Hannerz shows that this type of cultural apparatus facilitates the division of labour amongst people and determines their life chances as well as their perspectives. It is around those different perspectives that sub-cultures of different occupational and status groups are constructed. This view that cultures are complex and diverse is shared by Appiah (1997) in his critique of Afrocentrism, a cultural movement led by African-Americans. Appiah's main criticism is directed at the claims by Afrocentrists that Africa has a single unitary culture with a common origin in ancient Egypt. He finds the major weak point of this view as lying not only in its overlooking of the rest of Africa and African history, but also in its failure to avoid similar pitfalls as that of the European prejudice against cultures without writing (Appiah, 1997: 730). An example he cites is that of the nineteenth-century European curriculum which claimed that Western civilization's roots are traceable to the ancient Greece. This, he argues, failed to acknowledge the Egyptian influence on the Greeks, the Jewish contribution to Western culture and the Arabic intellectual influence of Plato's links with the Renaissance. Thus, for Appiah, Afrocentrism is nothing but simply "Eurocentrism turned upside-down." (See Appiah, 1997: 730)

While Hannerz acknowledges that the Third world cultures are to some degree influenced by First world cultures – e.g. that their technologies and genres which are not completely indigenous – he however dismisses the view that First world cultures necessarily pose a threat to Third world cultures. He argues that rather than openness to foreign cultural influences being seen as necessarily leading to an impoverishment of local and national culture, it should be seen optimistically. That is, that it could provide people in other cultures with access to technological and symbolic resources which could enable them to deal with their own ideas and to manage their own culture in new ways (Hannerz, 1997: 16)

Furthermore, Hannerz sees the contact between the Third world and First world cultures, facilitated through various cultural apparatus, as being mutually beneficial to both worlds. In his own words, he says "Along the entire creolizing spectrum, from First World metropolis to Third World village, through education and popular culture, by way of missionaries, consultants, critical intellectuals and small-town story tellers,

a conversation between cultures goes on. One of the advantages of the creolist view ... is its suggestion that the different cultural streams can create a particular intensity in cultural process.” (Hannerz, 1997: 16) Hence, that diversity is a source of cultural vitality and that rather than complexity and fluidity being seen as a threat to be avoided, they should be seen as an intellectual challenge (Hannerz, 1997: 17).

Hannerz’s viewpoint on creolism, cultural diversity and conversation between cultures would clearly be shared by Makgoba et al (1999) who, in the introductory chapter of their edited text entitled “African Renaissance”, argue:

“African culture is but one major contributor to the tapestry of world culture. While the process of creolisation has affected and impacted on all cultures, the histories, the consciousness of the bearers of a culture, the differing world views and the role of the intelligentsia and institutions in filtering the external or the influence of the other so-called cultures has been vital in maintaining distinctiveness between the differing major cultures. We still today recognise European, Oriental, American and African cultures. So, *in the midst of complexity there is simplicity, in the midst of order there is chaos, just as there is distinctiveness in the midst of creolisation or blurring in cultures.* When European powers carved Africa up into small territories, tribes and nations and imposed their languages and cultures, they forgot that the roots and essence of African culture would largely remain in the consciousness of the people despite speaking different colonial languages. French-speaking, English-speaking, Spanish-speaking or Portuguese-speaking Africans are still able to relate, share the same world view and interpretation as Africans despite all these real, but artificial, colonial impositions. The roots, history and consciousness of our culture are the same.” (Makgoba et al, 1999: xi)

These views on cultural diversity and creolism in the context of growing contacts as part of globalisation processes also support Senghor’s urgent appeal to Africans to re-cultivate African values so that they could make a positive, unique and rich contribution to what he calls *Civilization of the Universal*. Hence Senghor (1963)’s concept of *Negritude* by which he means “the awareness, defence and development of African cultural values” and defines it as “... the whole complex of civilized values – cultural, economic, social and political – which characterize the black peoples ....” (Senghor, 1996: 46) In his defence of the idea of negritude against strong criticism that negritude is a myth, he argues that while indeed it is a myth, it is a true myth and the “awareness by a particular social group or people of its own situation in the world,

and the expression of it by means of the concrete image....” (Senghor, 1996: 49)  
Pointing out to the real urgency for the need to cultivate negritude, he argues:

“With us, or in spite of us, the Civilization of the Universal is growing up before our eyes, thanks to scientific discovery, technical progress, the increase in international exchanges ... It will be monstrous unless it is seasoned with the salt of *negritude* ... [*N]egritude* is the sum total of the values of the civilization of the African world ... You must agree that the *Civilization of the Universal* will be brought about by the fusion of ‘differing civilizations’ .... But all these peoples and races must first re-discover the profundity of life; they must not only know it but ...be reborn with it....Today our Negritude no longer expresses itself as an opposition to European values, but as a *complement* to them. Henceforth, its militants will be concerned ... *not to be assimilated, but to assimilate*. They will use European values to arouse the slumbering values of Negritude, which they will bring as their contribution to the Civilization of the Universal ....”(Senghor, 1996: 50)

### 3.3. Concluding Remarks

While the period prior to political independence in Africa i.e. during colonialism, intellectual and political interest in indigenous African cultures and thought systems was informed by the liberation struggle priorities aimed at toppling the oppressive, exploitative Western colonial powers as well as at asserting the African identity, the post-colonial era saw a shift in that interest towards understanding and identifying the developmental role of those indigenous cultures and thought systems, in particular in the context of increasing globalisation and diversity. This point is better captured by English (1996) in his outline of periodisation of Senghor’s idea negritude, the idea that partly represents intellectual interest shown in indigenous African thought and cultural value systems. According to English, Senghor’s conception of negritude (the idea that first introduced by Aime Cesaire in 1939), as was analysed by Spleth (1985), went through three main historical phases. Note here his remarks:

“During the thirties and early forties, Senghor and other black intellectuals in Paris were feeling that their African ways of understanding were not fully compatible with their French ways of understanding...Negritude became each individuals’s search for a personal identity that would sort out these incompatibilities. During the second period, from the end of Senghor’s service in the French army of World War II to Senegal’s independence in 1960, Senghor advocated more other-directed causes: independence and cultural pride. He described

negritude as an 'anti-racial racialism', aimed at European racism and colonialism. Since independence, the third period, Senghor has used negritude with calm self-affirmation as a constructive instrument of national and cultural growth. Now, negritude is not only 'the awareness, defence, and development of African cultural values,' but also it 'welcomes the contemporary values of Europe.'" (English, 1996: 57-58)

It was, however, noted from the above review that this shift in interest in the indigenous African cultures and thought systems did not proceed without debate. The resultant debate is characterised by two main contrasting perspectives, which use mainly comparative analysis whereby African cultures and thought systems were compared and contrasted with those in the West, in effort to examine and determine the role and the relevance of African cultures and thought to societal development and progress.

On the basis of my review of those two main perspectives, I wish to argue that the perspective led by amongst others Gyeke, Horton and Temple, which holds the view that indigenous African cultural values and thought systems are regressive and incompatible with development, is difficult to sustain in the light of the counter analysis provided by amongst others Amato, Sogolo, Wiredu, Hannerz and Hallen. Claims, for instance, that deep religiosity and reliance on spiritual powers by Africans are inhibitive to the development of the spirit of rational inquiry and scientific approach are strongly countered by the empirical evidence which shows that, in fact reference to spiritual forces/powers (e.g. ancestors) does not have such inhibitive effects. Rather, and as Hallen has shown with the study of the Yoruba herbal practitioners, the continual reference to the significance of the reference to spiritual and divine powers, is appreciated for its functional significance to the further growth and development herbal practice and the community.

Another major weakness within this perspective lies in its tendency to present the traditional as peculiarly and intrinsically African and the modern as intrinsically Western. Wiredu, dismissing this tendency as misleading and incorrect, argues that when drawing useful distinctions between the traditional and the modern thought systems, cultural values and beliefs, it is imperative to note that in all societies there are both traditional and modern practices. This, together with Sogolo's argument that

the traditional and the modern values and practices are not mutually exclusive and incompatible, and Hallen's argument that even within the context of a single world view, it is possible to have significant levels of critical and reflective capacity, present a serious challenge to Horton's dichotomous thesis i.e. traditional/modern and primary/secondary. Also challenged here is Gyeke's suggestion that, for scientific and technological progress to be achieved, both science and technology should be separated from culture.

This suggestion is also difficult to defend in view of the creolist theory, whose implication is that the danger of such separation, especially in the era of increasing contacts between different cultures owing to globalisation processes would inhibit the mutual benefits and cultural vitality that could emerge from Hannerz's conversation between cultures. This is particularly so as Gyeke himself, and contradictorily so, admits that technology is a cultural product and therefore that the benefits of technology transfer would best be enhanced where the recipients actively participate in the innovative integration of technologies to realise their specific needs. If indeed technology is a product of culture, the view I agree with, Amato is then correct to argue that religious-inspired ideas and accounts are not necessarily regressive as philosophical reason is not independent of mythic, religious life of the people. This, together with Magubane's argument that the history of colonial disruption of indigenous African traditions and the evidence of scientific and technological developments and discoveries in pre-colonial Africa (see Sertima), further discredit the view that religiosity and mysticism in African cultures constitute majors obstacle to socio-economic and technological progress and development.

Both Gyeke and Wiredu, nonetheless, make a valid point that the West has made significant advances in the development of strong scientific base and principles for rational inquiry, and that for Africa to achieve the similar levels of scientific development, she has to rid herself of some of the backward customs and practices. Without a detailed discussion and analysis, I would argue that these findings present a strong case for the role of the indigenous African cultural heritage of ubuntu/botho, and its key defining principles and values, in the development of the contemporary South African society, especially in the context of the new democratic political

dispensation and globalisation. This is the subject that I address in some greater detail in subsequent parts of my doctoral project.

# **PART TWO**

## **Chapter Four**

### **On Ubuntu/Botho Culture and Economic Development in South Africa: A Review of Debates**



#### **4.1. Introduction**

It has become clear from the preceding two chapters that societal cultures and/or societal value systems are neither a dependent variable nor a passive variable in the processes of socio-economic change and development. Strong evidence arising from the current understanding as outlined in the preceding two chapters suggests that cultures and/or value systems play a pivotal role in the socio-economic life of any human society. The implication of this evidence for the African cultures and/or value systems of ubuntu/botho is that, as a societal culture or value system, they too have economic relevance and therefore a role to play in the economy. Notwithstanding this however, the question that remains and needs to be addressed is exactly what that role would be and/or is, how it could be realised, and under what conditions? What factors could inhibit or enhance ubuntu/botho culture's economic role and relevance? In what way could those factors be addressed? In addressing this question, it would be necessary to first outline what ubuntu/botho culture or value system is and what does it entail. What are its core defining values and virtues? What is their role in African communities? What is their economic value and relevance? What are the existing current perspectives, if any, on ubuntu/botho culture and its relationship to economy and the relevance thereof to the contemporary SA society? What are the bases of those perspectives? What lessons and insights, if any, do those perspectives provide for the analysis of the economic role that ubuntu/botho value system could play both in the current and future SA society?

#### **4.2. Literature Review of Debates on Ubuntu/Botho Culture and Development in Contemporary South Africa**

##### **4.2.1. Ubuntu or Botho Culture – What is it and what does it Entail?**

The debate around the ubuntu/botho culture and value system and its potential future role in SA developed against the background of the post-colonial challenges as outlined by Gyeke(see chapter one). It was necessitated by the imminent collapse of the apartheid political system in the late 1980s as the liberation struggle intensified, the prospects of the creation of a democratic system, and the lifting of international economic and political sanctions that would see SA's re-entry into the global

community and markets. The debate gained even greater momentum in the post-1994 period following the collapse of the apartheid political system, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its attendant problems and challenges. This is the period in which SA and most other African countries publicly declared the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the century for the renewal and advancement of the development of the African continent and for African countries become active, meaningful and competitive players on the international stage. In commitment to this declaration, the state president of the Republic of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, one of the key advocates of the idea of Africa's renewal as encapsulated in the concept of the African Renaissance, repeatedly emphasised this idea in his public addresses. Note, for instance, his reiteration of this commitment during his State of the Nation address on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2000 in the National Assembly:

Specifically, he said:

"... we should devote the Year 2000 that is upon us, to do everything that needs to be done to ensure that by its end, we see our entire Continent at the ready to join in a powerful movement of the peoples of Africa for the realisation of Africa's century ... The Government is committed to this goal and will do everything it can to ensure that it is realised. We also call on all our people in their various formations to respond to our call...The Government pledges its full support both to Nelson Mandela and Sir Ketumile Masire of Botswana as they work with the governments and people of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo to bring peace and democracy to these sister African countries".

Similarly, during his new year's message on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2000, he said:

"As we began this year, we said that the year 2001 should, for us, mark the commencement of the African Century. There are others elsewhere in our common world who have also declared their own intention to claim the century we are about to begin as their own. But for us as South Africans the determination to make this an African Century means many things in terms of what we ourselves must do". ([www.gov.co.za](http://www.gov.co.za))

Consistent with these statements were some of the bold initiatives taken by the African states aimed at the long term achievement of the goals of the advancement and development of Africa as well as strategic positioning of the continent in the era of increased globalisation. These included amongst others the formation of regional political and economic blocks such as the Southern African Development Community

(SADC), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), and the conversion of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) with a new mandate and renewed focus to confront and address the new challenges facing Africa. In South Africa similar initiatives were taken at the national level, aimed at advancing the course of Africa's renewal and realise socio-economic development as well as global competitiveness were embarked upon.

Part of these initiatives was the launching of what came to be known as the South African Chapter on African Renaissance through a conference held in Johannesburg, South Africa at the Karos Indaba Hotel in 1998. The conference, attended and addressed predominantly by Africans from different parts of the continent, had as its main objectives to define who Africans are and where they are going in the global community as well as to formulate practical strategies and solutions for future action for the benefit of the African masses. It addressed the themes of culture and education, economic transformation, science and technology, transport and energy, moral renewal and African values, and media and telecommunications. Questions discussed included: Has Africa a history of scientific and technological culture? How does African culture impact on science and technology? How can Africa best harness and exploit its natural and indigenous resources and its human diversity for its own benefit? What is the place of African religious systems in a changing Africa? What prospects are there for traditional African values in developing Africa? And what is the place of African social values in a globalising world? (Makgoba et al, 1999) Subsequent to this national conference, with clear continental relevance, other similar ones were held in different regions of South Africa with regional focuses but aimed to contribute to the broader national and continental initiatives. In all these conferences, the subject of ubuntu culture and its potential developmental role for Africa in the fast globalising world was amongst those discussed.

It is against this background that a growing interest in and debates around the African indigenous culture and value system of ubuntu developed and grew. This interest and debate were sparked by claims that the ubuntu culture and value system has a key role to play in the socio-economic development of post-apartheid democratic South Africa. Those holding and advancing this view believe that the strength of the ubuntu culture, which would help to enhance this role, lies in its unique values and virtues.

The first serious intellectual attempt to define and explain the ubuntu culture, which brought to light those key defining, unique features and virtues, was made by Jordan K Ngubane in the 1960s and 1970s. As Lodge notes, for Ngubane (1975), ubuntu “was a common foundation of all African cultures” and “a consciousness of belonging together” (Lodge, 2002: 231). According to Ngubane (1963), ubuntu or botho is a philosophy of life and the practice of being humane which gave content to life for African people long before the arrival of white settlers. He argues that this philosophy arose from the African supreme virtue or ethical code which attaches primacy to human personality as a sacred being. In terms of this ethical code or supreme virtue within the African philosophy of ubuntu or botho, human beings have a dual existence i.e. that in the physical world, this existence takes both the spiritual and physical forms, while at death, the physical form is discarded leaving only the spiritual form. The latter form is what is known as *idlozi* (in isiZulu) or *badimo* in Sesotho or *ancestors* in English. Ngubane thus argues that, for Africans, for there to be a good life, it is essential that each individual is treated with reverence and consideration (Ngubane, 1963: 75-77).

Its roots lie in the word *Sudic or Nudic*, with *Su* or *Nu* constituting the rootword of *person* in most Sub-Saharan African languages referring to primordial substance. The movements around the African continent, Ngubane argues, led to people in different geographical locations developing their own variants of *Su* or *Nu* such as “-*nho*, -*ni*, -*no*, -*ntfu*, -*ntu*, -*so*, -*su*, -*tho*, -*thu* and -*tu*, giving rise to person nouns such as: *mutum* (in Hausa language), *nmadu* (in Ibo language) *eniya* (in Yoruba language), *muntfu* in (Swazi language), *motho* (in Sotho language), *umuntu* (in Zulu), and *umntu* (in Xhosa)” (Ngubane, 1979: 63-64). In the Zulu language, Ngubane argues, derivatives from these variants include amongst other *Isintu* (meaning Humanity) and *Ubuntu* (meaning the art of being human), and hence that on this basis, there is talk about *nu- or su- or ntu-* oriented cultures which, put together, form the unity best referred to as African or Sudic or Nudic Civilisation (Ngubane, 1979: 65-66)

In the past decade and a half, and as part of ongoing debates around ubuntu/botho culture in SA, further attempts were made to define and describe this culture. While some referred to it as a “metaphor” (Mbigi and Maree, 1995), others described it as a “process and philosophy” (Makhudu, 1993; Togni, 1996)), and yet others as a

“statement” (Dandala, 1996), a “collective consciousness” (Prinsloo, 1996), and a “collective solidarity” (Laden, 1997). Notwithstanding these diverse accounts of what the ubuntu concept entails, there is however a wide consensus that its core defining values and virtues are respect, group solidarity, conformity, compassion, human dignity and humaneness, collective unity and solidarity, sharing, universal brotherhood, communalism, interdependence, and hospitality (Mdluli, 1987: 66-71; Mbigi and Maree, 1995: 2; Kamwangamalu, 1999: 25-26). Not only are these definitions consistent with the one provided by Ngubane, but also with Vilakazi’s, especially the emphasis on human centeredness of the ubuntu/botho culture. According to Vilakazi:

“Ubuntu is humanism and the human being is the foremost priority in all conduct: the value, dignity, safety, welfare, health, beauty, love, and development of the human being, and respect for the human being, are to come first, and should be promoted to first rank before all other considerations, particularly, in our time, before economic, financial, and political factors are taken into consideration. That is the essence of humanism, is the essence of ubuntu/botho.” (Vilakazi, 1999 quoted in Broodryk, 2002: 24)

It is worth noting that, although these ubuntu values look numerous, they are all linked to one another and their meaningful influence on the society is dependent on that interlinkage. This interlink is clearly noticeable from the detailed discussions of its values and virtues such as the one provided by Kamwangamalu (1999) in which he pays particular attention to the virtues of communalism and interdependence. Drawing from assertions that Africa is fundamentally “communocratic” (see Sekou Toure in Gyeke, 1987), in terms of which nobody is living for himself but for the community, Kamwangamalu argues that communalism is one of the core ubuntu virtues according to which the interest of the individual is subordinate to that of the group. Communalism, he argues, insists that the good of all determines the good of each or the welfare of each is dependent on the welfare of all (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 27). While communalism is the opposite of individualism, whereby these are associated with the western and African societies respectively, Kamwangamalu argues however that from the ubuntu perspective, communalism does not necessarily negate individualism. Rather, he argues with reference to Gyeke (1987:156), “communalism is the recognition of the limited character of the possibilities of the individual, which limited possibilities whittle away the individual’s self-sufficiency.”

(Kamwangamalu, 1999: 29) This view is also shared by Togni (1996) in his argument that while ubuntu philosophy discourages individualism, it however accepts and encourages individual aspirations and achievements if they in some ways benefit the community and not just the individual. This, he argues, is premised on the view and understanding that the community is a social resource within which individuals achieve their goals (Tongi, 1996: 112).

This suggests that not only are both the individual and the community mutually dependent and reinforcing but also that the individual draws strength from the community. As Tongi asserts, the community is a social resource for individuals. Closely linked to this virtue of communalism in ubuntu is that of interdependence, the essence of which “is that an individual owes his or existence to the existence of others”. The idea that “I am because you are and you are because I am” (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 29) or put differently that “a man can only be a man through others”. In some of the African indigenous languages in South Africa, this cardinal belief in ubuntu is phrased as: “*motho ke motho ka batho*” (a Sotho version) and “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye*” or “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” (a Zulu version).

This interpersonal emphasis and nature of ubuntu culture, it is argued, serves as a source of other key distinctive virtues of the culture of ubuntu such as patience, hospitality, loyalty, respect, conviviality, sociability, vitality, endurance, sympathy, obedience, and sharing (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 29, referencing Shutte, 1994; Prinsloo, 1996; and Mbigi and Maree, 1995). Arising from this interpersonal nature is the virtue of compassion, which Teffo argues, “is manifest through people’s desire to reach out of themselves, and in turn they find self-fulfilment and self-accomplishment” and “...is a feeling for the suffering of others. Promoting one to selflessly give help” (Teffo, 1999: 154-155).

Kamwangamalu’s paper, which provides a sociolinguistic analysis of ubuntu, highlights another important dimension to the ubuntu culture as well as around this culture i.e. the importance and role of language in ubuntu culture. This view is informed by the theory which asserts that “culture is a socially learned, shared assemblage of practices, perceptions, attitudes, world view, value system and beliefs”. Hence that the ubuntu cultural values “are not innate but are acquired in society and



are transmitted from one generation to another by means of oral genres such as fables, proverbs, myths, riddles, and story-telling”( Kamwangamalu, 1999: 27 and 31). Kamwangamalu thus argues that the acquisition, transmission and expression of the ubuntu values are achieved mainly through the use of language.

The importance of language as a medium through which cultural values such as ubuntu culture's are communicated and transmitted is best explained by Mogobo Nokaneng (1985), a Northern Sotho author, in his grammar textbook entitled *Segageso* (a Northern Sotho word for *Our/My Language or Our/My Culture*). In this book, Nokaneng, argues that maxims (known in Northern Sotho as *direto/diema*) form an integral part of African culture. Hence, they have a major influence on the lives of the African people since they are about the life of black people, the world in which they live, things with which they share in their existence on earth, things that they know, and those that they have seen and experienced. He argues that *diema*, as a true reflection on African's life and existence, constitute the words of ancestors and forefathers which is passed on to grandchildren and great-grandchildren in life. Hence *diema* have a dual significance to the society i.e. that they are about both the positive and constructive aspects of life and the negative and destructive aspects. According to Nokaneng (1985), on the positive and constructive side, *diema* could do the following:

- Advise and teach people about life experiences of forefathers, hence that they constitute a vital source of life as they originate from life experiences of previous generations from which the current generations can learn important lesson of life;
- Teach about respect;
- Strengthen families and extended family relationships;
- Teach people how to live peacefully with one another and/or good neighbourliness;
- Above all, place a strong emphasis on ubuntu.

On the negative and destructive side, according to Nokaneng (1985) they would be about the following:

- Bad habits and wrong doings;



- Criminal acts;
- Social problems;
- Bad influences or spitefulness.

Similarly, Kamwangamalu illustrates the positive function that language plays in the promotion of ubuntu-type values by citing the use of proverbs in some of the African Bantu languages such as Ciluba. Such proverbs, he argues, play a key role in the teaching and promotion of virtues communalism and interdependence. They include amongst others the following:

*“Ngoma umwe katu udila pa mukuba”* (This translates as: “One bell cannot ring on the belt”, “One finger cannot lift up a thing”)

*“Tshidima umwe tshiadia bangi”* (literally, “Harvested by one, eaten by many”)

*“Muntu apa muntu apa ki mbowa”* (literally, “A man here a man there means no fear”) or (“we can achieve anything if we support one another”)

*“Bubedi bwa disu mbubedi bwa diulu”* (literally, “The sickness of the eye is the sickness of the nose”) or (Your neighbour’s problem is your problem) (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 28-31).

In fact, and in support of Kamwangamalu and Nokaneng (1985)’s accounts, further evidence of language’s importance and role in the promotion of these ubuntu values can be found in some of the Northern Sotho *diema* as outlined below:

*“A tlala a e phsa madiba, a sutelela madibana”* (This translates as “Old wells overflow but eventually dry up, giving way to the new fresh wells.” It essentially provides a guidance on how young and old members of communities should relate – basically advising the adult or old members to work closely with the young, thus transmitting their wisdom and knowledge to them so that as they get older and become inactive, the young are adequately prepared and well equipped to run the show of life – including providing support to the old, just in the same way that they protected and supported them while they were still young)

*“etetsa serathana pele, ka moso se tla go etetsa”* (this expression also carries the same message and advice for the old)

*“mpsa tse pedi ga di sitwe ke sebata”* (literally, “Two dogs can’t be overpowered by a predator e.g. a lion.” The message it carries is that for any task to be made lighter, it is essential for people to put in a joint-effort and not work as individuals)

While the above examples demonstrate the significance of African languages in the promotion and upholding of the ubuntu values of communalism and interdependence, Kamwangamalu (1999) and Teffo (1999) also show that certain African language expressions serve to uphold other ubuntu values such as respect. As Teffo points out, the value of respect in ubuntu is expressed in different ways including both verbal and non-verbal forms of expressions. The verbal forms, for instance, include the different ways in which people use language to communicate amongst themselves. Making reference to isiXhosa, isiZulu and Sesotho languages, he argues, verbal forms involve “a careful choice and use of words and expressions....” In Northern Sotho, for instance, the notion of respect for elders is encapsulated in certain speech markers such as the use of the prefix *bo-* which, although signify plural form, could be employed in the context of communication to express respect for a single person rather than necessarily indicating plurality. This way of communication could be used by a young person when addressing or talking to or about an elderly person such a father through the use of expression *botate*, or older sister *boresi*, or even the chief *bokgosi* (Teffo, 1999: 159).

Other forms of language expression used within the context of ubuntu culture to promote and uphold the value of respect is shown by Kamwangamalu when he argues, with reference to Mthembu (1996), that “in Africa, communalism is a strong and binding network of relationships”. One example that Kamwangamalu cites to illustrate this point is that of children being regarded as not only belonging to their immediate biological parents but also to each and every adult within the community, with the adults having mutual responsibility to supervise, guide and protect each and every child. Another example is that of the use of the terms *sister* by Africans not necessarily to refer to a female sibling but to any other female member of the community (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 28).

Teffo also argues that respect within African communities and as promoted by ubuntu culture, is denoted through certain forms of physical gestures. For example a Venda woman, when making an offer to her husband, would not look straight in the husband's eyes and would crawl towards him with her face looking down until the offer has been done. Some would be quick to refer to this as a form of male domination. In support of Teffo, however a good example is that of an African man wearing a hat, who on entering a house and greeting either women or other men or even when being offered food to eat by a wife or other women, would take off the hat as an indication of respect. The point here is that respect or *ukuhlonipha* (in isiZulu) or *thlompho in* (Sepedi or Northern Sotho), as promoted by ubuntu is not a unidirectional practice meant to be shown only to men or to elders but to all members of the community including women and young people, although expressed and communicated in different linguistic<sup>1</sup> ways. The question is, what relevance do the above ubuntu/botho values have to socio-economic growth and development? This question is engaged through the review below.

#### **4.2.2. Ubuntu/Botho Culture and Development in South Africa:**

##### **A Focus on Work and Performance in the Workplace.**

The ubuntu values, most proponents argue, if strategically and innovatively tapped, could contribute positively to the socio-economic development of post-apartheid South Africa and give it a competitive edge in the world markets. Mbigi and Maree (1995), who are amongst the main advocate this viewpoint, base it on their understanding of ubuntu as a “metaphor that describes the significance of group solidarity on survival issues amongst African communities that are subjected to poverty as a result of deprivation, and which is effected through brotherly group care as opposed to individual self-reliance” (Mbigi and Maree, 1995: 4). Hence, as a universal concept that is applicable to every marginalised and poor community in the world, ubuntu requires that for the poor and the marginalised to survive their desperate material conditions, they should stick together on certain selective survival issues and display unquestioning loyalty and conformity to each other as well as be

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<sup>1</sup> Here I use language as broadly defined by Bockock (1992: 233), according to which language, as the main cultural practice, is not restricted to the use of words but includes all sign and symbol systems through which meaning is produced and communicated.

ready to sacrifice, suffer and display the spirit of service and patriotism on those survival issues (Mbigi and Maree, 1995: 7-8). They suggest that the ubuntu values can and should be harnessed into a transformative force by African countries around particular survival issues.

They believe that for the democratic South Africa to meet the challenges of reconstruction and development as well as to become economically competitive, its development structures, strategies and processes should harness the ubuntu values. This, they argue, should particularly be so with industrial, business enterprises since the western and eastern-based techniques of management alone would remain inadequate to overcome the challenges they faced. If such techniques are not strategically fused with the innovative African practices and processes anchored in the ubuntu value system, they argue, they would only enhance the attainment of competitive parity as opposed to competitive advantage and space (Mbigi and Maree, 1995: 2-4). Similarly, Lessem(1996: 187) argues that “unless business leaders in Southern Africa can tap such a spirit of ‘ubuntu’, align it with Eastern and Western management techniques and turn it into a material force for reconstruction and development, they will have no collective or individual future”(quoted in Kamwangamalu, 1999: 33).

This view is also shared by Mbigi and Maree (1995) who argue that post-colonial Africa needs to harness its indigenous cultural resources, practices and institutions and creatively fuse them with the foreign Western and Eastern ones in order to attain competitive space and competitive advantage. To support this point, they refer to Mazrui’s statement in BBC interview to the effect that:

“... in the final analysis the shallowness of the imported institutions is due to that culture gap between the new structures and ancient values, between alien institutions and ancestral traditions. Africa can never go back completely to its pre-colonial starting point but there may be a case for at least a partial retreat, a case for re-establishing contacts with familiar landmarks of yesteryear and restarting the journey of modernisation under indigenous impetus”(Quoted in Mbigi and Maree, 1995: 5).

This line of argument is based on the view that South Africa has a “triple cultural heritage” comprised of the northern/European, Asian and African value systems and cultures. This triple cultural heritage, Mbigi (1997) believes, would not only help in reconciling the historical differences and conflicts, but also in enhancing the achievement of efficiency, productivity, profitability and competitiveness. According to him, the triple heritage would fulfil the following complementary functions: The European heritage would contribute to strategic planning and control through the theory of business competition using tools such as budgets and financial ratios, PBT (profit before tax), ROI (return on investment) and Cash Flow. The Asian heritage would provide the means of managing the process and process controls such as measurement of efficiency, quality waste, down time and speed of response. The African heritage would be instrumental in providing the tools of managing people and performance relationships, the spirit of co-operation, of serving in harmony and also of African hospitality. Hence, ubuntu will create a rainbow mentality in organisations characterised by cultural, racial, religious, tribal and political tolerance and thus a celebration of cultural diversity in business enterprises (Mbigi, 1997:8).

One area in which the ubuntu/botho culture, as African heritage, is said to have a role to play is that of human resources development and management. For this area, Mbigi and Maree (1995) propose what they call an “ubuntu developmental model” which they believe would help to provide a holistic focus on development questions in management practices, processes and systems. This model focuses on a continuous improvement and development of people, products, systems and, structures, markets, productivity, quality and performance. Its essence, they argue, “is a single-minded dedication to total development and transformation” (Mbigi and Maree, 1995: 87). They argue that the developmental model should be informed by principles that are anchored in the ubuntu values of the African tribal village community which lay an emphasis on human dignity and respect. Those principles they describe as “MIST” which stands for Morality, Interdependence (this acknowledges that wealth creation is realisable through collective effort), Spirit of man (emphasises respect and dignity), and Totality (recognition that wealth creation requires continuous improvement of everything by collective effort of every single member of an organisation) (Mbigi and Maree, 1995: 88-89).

Clearly the argument for the need to tap, integrate and fuse different cultural experiences and values to inform and enhance business management principles, practices and approaches is seen as an appropriate response to the challenges presented by diversity in the new context of democracy and globalisation. Note the argument by Lessem and Nussbaum (1996:11) that “while management principles are universal, the context in which they are implemented is critical to the form and shape they should take in any particular environment” (quoted in Kamwangamalu, 1999: 32). Kamwangamalu thus observes that the use of ubuntu in the business sector in South Africa is meant to achieve the following: “to enable business leaders to understand the cultural and behavioural context in which they are developing their approach to business; to develop management principles which incorporate African values; to give cultures that were previously kept apart by apartheid an opportunity to celebrate their diversity and build on the strengths of that diversity; and to enable business leaders to shift paradigms in the conduct of business (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 33, paraphrasing from Mbigi, 1995 and Lessem, 1996).

Lodge (2002) also noted similar assertions that ubuntu/botho culture has a potential role to play in the socio-economic development and transformation of the post-apartheid, democratic South Africa. Arguing that the ubuntu concept has become a key feature in the thinking and language of African Renaissance, whereby it is being suggested that the impersonal modern bureaucratic forces, global markets and electronic technology could be humanised and adapted to the African needs, Lodge notes that “*ubuntu* discourse have helped to generate a mini-industry”(Lodge, 2002: 230-231). This, he argues, could be seen from the mushrooming of ubuntu consultancies such as the Ubuntu Institute based in the city of Pretoria. The Institute prepares seminars on topics such as “ubuntu marketing and public relations” and “ubuntu management” (Lodge, 2002: 231).

Lodge also notes that the Human Sciences Research Council, a body that does mainly policy oriented research in South Africa, has suggested at one of its seminars that “ubuntu is more than just a set of values governing personal relations, that it represents a sub-system which can supply the foundations for democratic institutions.” He also points out to similar kind of claim by a South African Constitutional Court judge, Yvonne Mokgoro, who he argues, suggested that the



“ubuntu principles could help to shape the future of south African jurisprudence.” Mokgoro (1998), he notes with concern, advances the argument that the “key ubuntu values such as collectivity, unity and group solidarity could inspire realignment of the adjudication process so as to promote ‘peace and harmony between members rather than the adversarial approach in litigation which emphasises retribution.”(Lodge, 2002: 231).

These assertions on ubuntu/botho culture and its role in South Africa’s democratic transformation and socio-economic development should be understood within the context of a “cultural turn” (Ray and Sayer, 1999) or a “cultural *return*” (Thompson and Findlay, 1999). Within this context, it becomes difficult to ignore or easily dismiss such assertions. It is even more difficult if one considers evidence presented by Nuance (1963 and 1979) which shows the significant role that the ubuntu/botho culture has played in the lives of the African people and the political liberation struggle in South Africa historically. According to Ngubane, ubuntu/botho culture, which he also calls the *Sudic culture* and/or the *Sudic* evaluation of person, has always defined and shaped the lives of Africans even long before the arrival of white settlers and proved itself to be resilient by surviving some of the harshest historical conditions. Note here his remarks:

“This philosophy gave content to life in the Sutu-nguni states before the advent of the white man. Defeat shattered the political and social institutions that gave visible expression to this attitude. Disaster could not, however, penetrate so deeply into the African’s being as to destroy those things he prized most- the perspectives from which he viewed life and which gave it meaning. These remained deep in his life, giving him spiritual sustenance in moments of trial. He has always clung to them with a determination that nothing seems capable of cracking ...

... The refusal to abandon the great humanistic principle was not a new development. In the great migrations from the north to the south, the Sutu-nguni had lost every material possession in the tropical jungle, but he had not parted with the *botho* doctrine, no matter what happened. Life itself has been threatened so seriously at every stage that the miracle is how such large masses of men and women ever got through the thick forests to establish settled communities and reconstruct their civilization in the south. In these great movements, the individual had always been exposed to the deadly conspiracy of disease, wild animals, and a hostile climate. The battle for survival had made him realize that in the final analysis the individual’s



appreciation of the others' potential for giving help in the battle for survival" (Ngubane, 1963: 77-78).

Ngubane's argument about the resilience of indigenous African cultural values and practices is echoed in Bonginkosi Nzimande's address to the 1988 Organisation for Appropriate Social Services in South Africa (OASSSA) conference on the subject of the indigenous traditional African Life and what he terms the "hidden abode of mental health". In this address, Nzimande argued that, in spite of the changes that the African traditional and cultural practices such as the explanation and conceptualisation of mental health and approach to treating mental disorders have undergone and which have their origins in the pre-colonial period, their core practices were maintained (Nzimande, 1988: 4).

Current experiences within black African communities lend support to the view that indigenous African cultural practices and values have resilience and continue to have relevance. Examples of such practices include burial societies outside the Western-type funeral parlours and funeral policies. Such burial societies are constituted of large group individuals, often known to each other and coming from similar areas (e.g. villages or townships), who come together to pull their resources together in order to help each other during times of death. Resources pulled together include financial support, supply of cutlery, chairs and physical labour in terms of assisting with cooking and cleaning, as well as emotional support to the bereaved household and/or family. In townships, burial societies are made of people from the same street sections whereas in rural villages it could be large sections of the village or most part of the village.

Another closely related practice during time of funerals, which is more of support especially in rural villages, is that of people coming together to help with the digging of graves. In most of the Limpopo Province villages, this practice is known as *diphiri* (in English meaning *hyenas*), a figurative word used to describe the group of people helping with grave digging during funerals. Such a group is mainly constituted of able-bodied young men. This collective support and labour helps greatly in cutting down financial costs for the bereaved as it involves no payment for the support received. The motive here is not profit making as is the case with Western-style

funeral parlours and funeral policies, but to prove mutual support in times of difficulty, which is in line with the spirit of the communal practice known as *letsema*. The latter refers to the communal effort whereby a group of people within the village come together to lend support to individual households in growing fields with weeding and harvesting; in fire wood collection especially for occasions such as funerals and weddings, and other activities that may require high labour input. In all of these activities, the members of the community who provide such support do not expect payment or are not given any monetary payment, but are only given food and indigenous beer as a way of thanking them for their support. This is communal practice whereby households and villagers give each other support in turns. During weddings, people assist each other with the whole range of activities e.g. cooking, wedding preparations, construction or putting up of tents, slaughtering of animals for meat, and collection of fresh water as well as fire wood. The activities and practices cited above are anchored in the values of ubuntu/botho culture. Their continued existence and relevance today supports Ngubane's and Nzimande's argument that the indigenous African traditions and cultures have resilience. This presents a challenge to the rather pessimistic picture portrayed by some analysts as could be seen, for instance, in the following critique and argument by Lodge (2002):

"The invocation of tradition ignores the extent to which Africa has changed. Today, half of the continent's population lives in towns, not in villages or homesteads, and in circumstances in which traditional ideas of reciprocity and social responsibility are very difficult to sustain. Within the first decade of the twenty-first century it is likely that most of Africans will speak English, not just as an occasional medium of communication in the workplace but as the language of everyday life." (Lodge, 2002: 235)

The highly cherished and valued culture and philosophy of ubuntu/botho, Ngubane (1963 and 1979) argues, has played an instrumental role in the historical struggle against white colonial conquest and control in South Africa. The momentum of this struggle picked up in the late nineteenth century and continued to increase in strength and sophistication throughout the twentieth century, crippling the apartheid system and its institutions.

Informed and guided by the principles of the ubuntu/botho culture and philosophy, and in spite of differences in approach and strategy, Ngubane argues, Africans mobilised into a united front to confront and challenge the united white front, rejecting the destiny prescribed by white policies i.e. the destiny of a racially and tribally unequal and divided society. In the late 1800s, he cites examples of this united front such as in the Eastern Cape Colony whereby the Xhosa-speaking leaders formed an organisation known as *Imbumba Yama Afrika* to preserve and defend Africans' interests. The unifying nature of this organisation, he argues, could be seen from the fact that it was given this name to signify its appeal to all African language groups rather than being called *Imbumba Yama Xhosa*, which would have restricted its coverage and scope to the Xhosa ethnic group, thus giving it a narrow ethnic/tribal outlook. Similarly Cetshwayo, the Zulu King, is reported to have made an appeal and request in the 1870s to other African states to form a military alliance and/or a Black United Front in order to protect and declare Southern Africa a Black collective security area.

In the later period following the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, Ngubane (1963 and 1979) points out to advancement and clear articulation by Dr P. ka I. Seme of Cetshwayo's 1870s idea of the need to strongly counter white supremacy and prescribed destiny and identity for Africans. To advance this idea, which enjoyed overwhelming support from most Africans, he argues, Seme convened the historic Unity Conference in Bloemfontein in 1912 attended by African leaders representing all Southern African language groups resident both in SA and Protectorates. This conference led to the formulation of the South African Native National Congress (the fore-runner of the African National Congress). Referring to illustrate Seme's articulation of the idea behind the Unity Conference, Ngubane argues:

"Seme made it clear that the alternative to the prescribed destiny was the creation of a '*new and unique civilization*' on the basis of '*a common controlling idea.*' This idea was the Sudic evaluation of the person, which '*the people with the common destiny*' translated into experience in their different environments. No African should ever apologise for being a member of his language group; none should ever be made apologise for being the child of his or her particular parents, for *to belong to a given language-group or normarchy was a quality of being human; all were the faces of humanity's many-sided face; all were the faces of*

*Africa's many-sided face*. This 'enlightened perception of the true intertribal relation' gave a unifying momentum to the cultures of peoples of Africa; it made them a 'people with a common destiny.' The 'perception' had 'fusing force' because it defined the person in mature and positive terms (*my emphasis*) (Ngubane, 1979: 124).

According to Ngubane's analysis, the influence of the ubuntu/botho cultural values and philosophy in the thinking of Africans and their struggle against white supremacy, could be seen from the differences between the white and the black united fronts. He argues that while the white united front was built on principles that upheld white supremacy, the black united front or African front "was based on the principle that values of life with a similar meaning on both sides of the racial line were more reliable bonds of national unity and provided better guarantees of security for the individual and survival for the group than race or blood" and hence that the emphasis here was on the value of the individual. Hence, that "in so far as Africans were concerned, race was no longer to be a factor of significance in assessing the worth of a person" (Ngubane, 1963: 73-74). This ubuntu/botho evaluation of human personality, Ngubane argues, was clearly articulated by Seme in his writing in the black owned and run newspaper *Imvo Zabansuntu* in 1911 in which he wrote:

"The greatest success shall come from when man shall have learned to co-operate, not only with his own kith and kin, but with all peoples and with all life... There is today among all races and men a general desire for progress, and for co-operation, because co-operation will facilitate and secure that progress" (Ngubane, 1979: 125 quoted from Karis and Carter, Vol. 1, Doc. 21).

This initial phases in the liberation struggle, whereby Seme and other prominent African leaders and thinkers focused their attention on unifying all Africans in Southern Africa around a common goal of creating a alternative new nation to that prescribed by the white system, and fighting through 'constitutional methods'<sup>2</sup>, Ngubane (1963: 80 and 1979:1 30) argues, prepared the ground for a further even more militant struggle. This struggle came to be led by the new generation of younger African leaders whose main objective was not only to build on the unity achieved by

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<sup>2</sup> According to Ngubane (1963:80-81) Constitutional methods used included the calling of public meetings, protests, demonstrations, passing of resolutions, and sending deputations to white men in authority positions. As he puts it, this strategy was for waiting for white authority to take the initiative in introducing laws and if they are deemed oppressive, the ANC would then strongly protest.

the older generation and advance the *Ideal of Nationhood* crafted at the Bloemfontein conference, but also to transcend the existing strategy of constitutional methods through militant action aimed at overthrowing white minority rule, self-determination and African majority rule. Hence Ngubane's observation, based on this analysis and his assessment of shift in strategies from those used by the old leadership such as the theologian Z.R. Mahabane who preferred to pray for unity around Collective Will than take up arms, that:

"A new generation of leaders came to the fore. They were not interested in prayer; they were not interested in dialogues; they were not interested in the White 'friends' of the African. *They spoke a new language*; they concerned themselves with the African's destiny. The generation of their fathers had created the African monolith but hesitated to face squarely the inexorable logic of monolithism. The young men and women who formed themselves into the Congress Youth League grew up in a climate of systematic deprivation and dispossession." (Ngubane, 1979: 133) (*My emphasis*)

Highlights of this militancy were, according to Ngubane (1963), the 1951-52 Defiance Campaigns despite their limited impact on the government's attitude and determination to prescribe for Africans a destiny of racially and ethnically/tribally divided and unequal society. The Youth League's commitment to the 1912 Bloemfontein Ideal of Nationhood, which was outlined in its Manifesto, was best articulated by Ashley Peter Mda, who took over the League's leadership after the death of Anton Mziwakhe Lembede, when he outlined its key objective as being to: create a united nation out of the heterogeneous tribes; free Africa of foreign domination and foreign leadership; as well as to create conditions in which Africa would contribute to human progress (Ngubane, 1979: 135-136).

The massive repression by apartheid government forces in the 1950s and 1960s saw the ANC and the PAC as well as other liberation organisations being driven underground or into exile, leaving behind a leadership vacuum for the African masses. This vacuum, Ngubane argues, was later to be filled by revitalised forms of mobilisation led, on the one hand, by the new leadership of the students' organisation, the South African Students Association (SASO) which upheld the ideology of Black Consciousness and, on the other, by the Bantustan and homeland leaders. Ngubane (1979) categorised these two groups into the radical medialists and functional

collaborators/functionalist respectively, due to their differences in approach and strategy for fighting apartheid system. While the radical medialists were opposed to collaboration with Europeans in their call for the unity of all races which made South Africa their home, the functionalists, working towards a similar goal but drawing from what they considered lessons learnt from the past, felt that a strong united front could only be achieved when Africans are well organised at *every plane* (Ngubane, 1979: 142).

The functionalists, Ngubane argues, were concerned that the apartheid regime was determined to destroy the Bloemfontein Ideal of Nationhood as was noted from the severe repression in the 1950s and early 1960s, preferred to confront it from the position of strength which required minimum investment in human life but still moving towards similar goals as the militant medialists. Hence that by committing themselves to the ideal of a federal state in the form of a Federal Union of the Autonomous States of Southern Africa, the ideal developed and agreed to at the 1973 homeland and bantustan leaders' Umtata Conference, these leaders helped to give the original Bloemfontein Ideal of Nationhood a geopolitical content. This commitment, Ngubane argues, could be seen from the statement by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, the leader of KwaZulu Bantustan, in which he said:

“Let us face it that we can never really talk terms with Whites as small separate entities. We can only bring White South Africa to her knees if we achieve and use black solidarity ... We realise as Blacks that if this dream (of a federal union) came true we could not have Black unity and our sense of Nationhood in the various Black states, on the basis of crushing the languages and cultures of non-Africans. Each member of such a new society would of necessity have a right to live out his or her life in the light of his or her experience and choices...The bond of union should be our common humanity, *ubuntu*, or Humanism and not race, creed, colour, age or sex. This means a non-racial society in which every human being would have the right and opportunity to make the best possible use of his life” (Ngubane, 1979: 143-144).

Contrary to this functional collaborationist stand adopted and upheld by the Bantustan and homeland leaders, Ngubane argues, radical medialists called for non-cooperation with the apartheid regime. This, he argues, was noticeable from statements such as those by the leaders of SASO that:

“We do not need the co-operation of the White man any more – and we do not want him. We can find liberation from perpetual servitude on our own...”



... The Black person must realise that he is on his own...In order that a group of people can bring about a change there must be an identity of interests...Any identical interests between Blacks and Whites is effectively blurred by the colour question. The Blacks... must be deeply rooted in their own being and see themselves as a functional monolithic structure. This means that Black people must build themselves to a position of non-dependence on Whites. They must work towards a self-sufficient political, social and economic unit...The way to the future is not through directionless and arrogant multi-racialism but through a purposeful and positive unilateral approach. Black man, you are on your own...." (Ngubane, 1979: 248)

Hence Ngubane's argument that radical medialists, whom he also calls functional monolithists, no longer interested in making concessions to and integrating Africans into white man's economy, committed themselves to destroying the white power structure and replace it with a new society based on the ideal of nationhood rooted in the African experience. This, he argues, was best captured in the following programme of principles and goals developed at the 1971 Black Peoples Convention:

- to liberate and emancipate Blacks from psychological and physical oppression;
- to create a humanitarian society where justice is meted out equally to all;
- to co-operate with existing agencies with the same ideals;
- to re-orientate the theological system with a view of making religion relevant to the aspirations of the Black People;
- to formulate and implement an education policy of Blacks, by Blacks for Blacks (Ngubane, 1979: 251).

It is interesting to note from Ngubane's account that, notwithstanding the differences in strategies and approaches used by the liberation forces to fight the political system of racial segregation and apartheid in South Africa, the influence of the ubuntu/botho culture on the struggle helped to ensure that all these forces fight towards a common goal i.e. the *Ideal of Nationhood and/or The Collective Will* first formulated at the 1912 conference but with its roots in the late nineteenth century. Thus, and as Ngubane asserted, the ubuntu/botho culture here played a vital role of unifying Africans in their different organisations around this common goal. Hence his argument:



“One of the developments ignored is the direction in which the *Collective Will* is moving events inside the segregated homelands. Whether or not we like the leaders of the homelands is not important for purposes of this discussion; what matters is whether or not their actions serve the ends of the Collective Will.” (*My emphasis*) (Ngubane, 1979: 141)

Other studies conducted on black workers, although not necessarily about ubuntu/botho culture *per se*, provide evidence that supports Ngubane (1963 and 1979)’s account. They reveal the positive influence of the ubuntu culture’s virtues and values on black workers living and working under harsh conditions of colonial and apartheid-capitalist exploitation and oppression. For instance, the study by Gordon (1977) of the black mineworkers in Namibia (re-edited by Webster et al, 1994) discovered that the workers’ understanding of their situation as being oppressive, saw them developing two distinct social worlds as a response. Those worlds are described by Gordon as being the “public world” in which the workers interact with white management for survival reasons and for coping with exploitation and the “private world” within the interstices of the formal organisational structure and grounded in the compound. The former world is characterised by workers’ adherence and observing of certain rules of etiquette during interaction with whites. Within this world, Gordon argues, black workers embark on quota restriction or restriction of production output as a coping and defence mechanism. As he points out, quota restriction enabled workers to avoid fatigue by minimising the rigours of work, controlling work pace, exerting some control over their own work targets, as well as by streamlining the job without being blamed by white supervisors. Hence that:

“Quota restriction prevents competition at the workplace which would disturb established interpersonal relationships and protects slower brothers thus alleviating white pressure because it is believed that if one worker works harder, the white will also expect other workers to put more effort into their tasks. This ability to avoid being obviously manipulated by white supervisors is important for the workers’ self-respect. Blacks at the mine have also realised the importance of numbers or group cohesion as a means of coping and defense. Whites are likely to be impressed and are more likely to investigate a complaint about a white supervisor’s behaviour if the whole gang walks off and lodges a complaint than if an individual complains. Such walk offs were quite frequent and entailed considerable brotherhood solidarity” (Gordon, 1994: 154-155)

Similar evidence pointing to black African workers' greater control of their work and their ability to determine levels of work performance and productivity was presented by Sitas (1983). This he established through in-depth qualitative interviews with some black African metal workers in the East Rand area, on the East of Johannesburg. It is helpful to quote the following responses by his interviewees:

"The boss was always at the white workers for doing things too slow. 'Time is money' said the boss, 'right' said the white workers to each other, 'we know that.' The longer they took on finishing a job, the more overtime and money. They told us to go it slower, we did n't need telling. We would shovel the sand slowly and take it to them, take a breath and go again. When the boss was screaming at them, they would say, 'It's the kaffirs,' 'they work too slow,' so the boss would give us hell. This didn't happen many times, because we would start working like being possessed and work would pile up for them and they would get into trouble if they didn't work fast. They would swear but they knew, there was an understanding with the whites ...

When there was a bonus because of a job that had to finish by a certain time, then we would work fast and finish in half a day and take it easy. It was very funny. On this there was again understanding with the whites." (Sitas, 1983: 306 – 307)

Sitas (1983) thus observed and argued with regard to this coping and work control tactics used by black African workers:

"... all of them admit to 'playing the fool' a lot of time. In fact, most bragging after hours involved the theatrical re-enactment of how time was cheated out of the supervisors and the bosses. But simultaneously, most of the tasks were arduous and a lot of the time of 'loitering' the workers claim were 'breathers' after hours of carrying, shoving, lifting, holding and hammering..." (Sitas, 1983: 307)

The private world, on the other hand, is characterised by the culture that he defines as 'brotherhood' in which "blacks can be 'themselves' and their 'own' actions" (Gordon, 1994: 151). The influence by ubuntu/botho cultural value and principles on black worker's attitudes, behaviour and actions is evident from Gordon's explanation below of the 'brotherhood':

"Brotherhood is the means by which the blacks protect 'their own people.' It emphasises respect, trust, consultation and dignity...A 'good' brother uses the proper modes of address,

participates freely in drinking both as a sponsor and a s guest, has a large circle of friends, is generous, tries to help his fellow workers as far as possible through making or arranging loans, giving gifts and doing 'favours', does not pry into the private matters of others, strives within the situation to look after his own problems as much as possible before asking for assistance and regularly sends remittances home" (Gordon, 1994: 151-152).

This form of resistance and strategy for the protection of fellow *brothers* from white capitalist exploitation as observed and uncovered by Gordon amongst Namibian black mine workers, bears reflection on what Sitas (1996) calls "diffusionary forms of control" in South African hostels "where people were treated like animals". By "diffusionary forms of control", Sitas (1996:237) was describing a situation whereby the ability of municipal, township or administration boards to control and co-ordinate activities of hostel inmates (i.e. black African migrant workers) were restricted. In fact, and even though he does not make explicit mention that ubuntu/botho culture was at play, Sitas (1996)'s study reveals evidence that points to the positive influence of the indigenous African cultural values and principles of ubuntu or botho such as "solidarity", "respect" and "compassion" and "interdependence" on the lives of black migrant metalworkers who formulated part of the subject of his study. This is clearly captured in his argument, which I am citing here at some length in order to highlight his discoveries as evidence of ubuntu/botho culture's influence, that:

"Inside the bricked and tawdry walls of the hostels a complex informal pattern of association was always in existence, deflecting and responding to urban pressures. These associations, or defensive combinations, spawned a variety of cultural formations that co-existed alongside each other. My study of the experiences of migrant metalworkers revealed that on the East rand, in the so-called Nguni hostels, most cultural formations (55 percent of the cases) subsisted on an area or regional basis: people from a specific rural area (e.g. Xolo, or Pongola) interacted actively together after work. To a lesser extent such forms of associations had an ethnic basis e.g. Zulu or Xhosa or Shangaan (25 per cent). Finally only some associations (15 per cent) cut across ethnicity. These cultural formations, I would like to argue, deflect 'pressures' and regulate behaviour within defined social spaces. They deflect what I would like to describe as processes of 'alienation', 'disvaluation', 'disoralia' and 'degendering'. The process of alienation has to be distinguished from disvaluation, disoralia and degendering. By 'disvaluation' I mean an experience of loss and defamiliarization, as normative patterns and reciprocal relationships are challenged in the urban centres, being in essence a disvaluation from the way of life that has been generated through the history of a people, its folklore and meanings. There is very little in the institutional life of hostels and factories that facilitate

reciprocity, save through the efforts of ordinary people to generate binding norms and values and systems of socialisation. Furthermore, by 'disoralia' .... I want to denote the pressures that affect the possibility of communication, language, its meaning-generating capacities, the way ordinary migrant's symbolic capital becomes devalued – a process affecting hundreds of millions of oral people gripped by the tides of noise, distortion and meaning embedded in capitalism's new spaces. Migrants' cultural formations create new language contexts, hybrids and creoles ... by 'degendering' I want to denote the pressure on gender roles as men and women are thrown into the mill and ground ... Over years, patterns of behaviour came to be regulated in the hostels of the East rand. New migrants would immediately be taken care of the moment they entered the hostel. People from the same region, or clansmen, would immediately organise the newcomer's life along group lines. Without this form of combination, respect and exercising their knowledge and experience in the city provided counsel, leadership or advice" (Sitas, 1996: 237-238).

Thus for Sitas (1983), workers' defensive combinations and cultural formations emerged as a response and resistance to the squalid, oppressive and exploitative conditions, resulting in what he terms "slumyard" or "slum" culture. Hence his observation:

".... This cultural formation provided people with many ways of defending themselves against the harsh conditions of the city: brewing, which was prohibited, mutual aid and burial associations new common law marriages, all night parties, were part of its elements. Here, the 'lumpen,' the unemployed and the proletarian interacted in a web of activities defying legality, participating in a culture of survival and escape. All of them efforts to mutual break alienation in South Africa's industrial life." (Sitas, 1983: 199)

Thus, contrary to the sociology of adjustment's assertion that laid emphasis on workers' adaptation to the imposed social roles within production, Sitas argues, the black metalworkers' defensive combinations and cultural formations were autonomous and irreducible to relations of production (Sitas, 1983: 43). He argues that instead that they constituted attempts to defensively break alienation through exercising control over their conditions of existence and work, thus placing limits on capital's ability to successfully create a stable and compliant workforce (Sitas, 1983: 42, 195 and 196). This can be seen from what Sitas saw as the transformation of cultural formations towards the organisation of worker power into trade union organisations. The result was, he argues, increased worker mobilisation into unions led by shop-stewards and increased militancy leading to explosion into the early

1980s strike wave amongst the East Rand African metal workers. As Sitas points out, workers' responses mediated by trade union organisation "embodied in the transformation of metalworkers cultural formations, beginning with the factories and spreading to the hostels, created a new terrain of conflict. On the one hand, a new sense of injustice linking issues of wages, oppression and control, on the other, a new sense of justice embodying new moral codes, defined the social being and consciousness of migrant metalworkers" (Sitas, 1983: 438).

The defensive combinations and cultural formations Sitas (1996) discussed, constitute an example of the 'myriad brotherhoods' which Moodie (1994:20) argues, existed in South African gold mine compounds formed around entrepreneurial services such as hair cutting, tailoring and bicycle repairs, around religious concerns, burial societies, and musical tastes. Moodie thus argues that:

"...the mine compound left room for alternative cultural adaptations. Although the mine sought to control workers' leisure time, compound dwellers obliged management to leave space for their own activities. These activities made up migrant cultures. They were worked out with fellow migrants in various social networks, not as individual adaptations. The network often reached back into the rural areas from which migrants had come and to which almost all of them would return. Workers who came to the mines to realize some rural project, whether to earn cattle for their fathers, or obtain wives, or sustain rural production in building up a homestead, found like-minded fellows with whom to associate. In fact, they often went to the mines with home friends. They could smoke and drink and converse and relax and play together on the grounds and might eventually even explore the temptations of the red lights of town, insulated by each other's company. This was the home world integrated into the world of work" (Moodie, 1994: 20-21)

Similarly, Moodie (1994: 24) found that "on the mines, workers formed social networks supporting migrant cultures whose common sense was firmly rooted in commitment to rural practice". Hence within such networks of sharing, cultures of solidarity and personal identities were maintained and recreated. This point also resonates with the remarks of Shula Marks (2001) on the experiences of black migrant mineworkers in South Africa between the late nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century. She argues:

“...their (i.e. black migrant miners) cultural baggage should have provided the framework for both the disciplinary order established within the mines and the strategies of survival of the miners themselves...the ancestors, their cattle, and home, a deep fear of witchcraft and recourse to protective folk medicines, remained as central to their lives as comradeship and the dignity of work, and consciousness of the brutality and exploitation of their lives” (Marks, 2001: 23).

This evidence, I would argue, presents a challenge to the narrow materialist accounts of workers’ solidarities, collective behaviour and actions such as that of ‘brotherhood’ and ‘formal associations’, which attribute them to the dominant material economic conditions of exploitation by the property owning classes. These forms of solidarity and behaviour cannot only be solely explained in terms of reference to the material forces but also in terms of the cultural forces that are obviously at play. They reveal that both the material and cultural forces at work. Also challenged, in the light of this evidence, are the historically racist stereotypical attitudes held mainly amongst whites towards black people and their culture, which were replicated in the workplace by white managements in their treatment and relationship with the black workforce. Note here for instance Sitas’ recording of white metal sector manufacturers’ racist, negative perceptions of the “native” workers (a term previously used by white people to refer to black African workers)’s productivity as industrial workers:

“The realisation that Natives possess a natural aptitude for the performance of repetitive tasks, which are the basis of mass production manufacture” ...

“The facts of monotony and consequent fatigue, so important a problem in mass production is virtually non-existent as far as the Native is concerned, especially if he is employed on machines with rhythmic motions”...

... “The Native in industry is an incredible problem. In the past one of my favourite sayings has been that the only way to bring a native into industry was to put him on a conveyor belt, when, if he stopped working for a moment, something red hot fell on his foot ...” (Sitas, 1983: 200, 2001 and 207)

Such stereotypes were attributed to ignorance on the part of white employers in SA in the past about black South Africans and their indigenous culture. The ignorance was perpetuated by business consultants and social scientists such as industrial



psychologists whom Webster (1981) called the “servants of apartheid” as their research deliberately avoided inquiry into controversial areas. Instead, they chose to focus their research on developing “theories of black and white industrial behaviour that take as given the social structure” and thus helping to legitimise and reproduce apartheid system (Webster, 1981). Notable too is Fullagar (1984)’s critique and dismissal of the view that industrial psychology is a “neutral science” which emphasises objective observation of industrial behaviour without taking any particular moral or principled position. As the reviews of these works have shown, the tragic outcome has been that the “knowledge” generated by those consultants and psychologists was theory-less and based on sheer common sense. They failed to consider, in their analysis, the broader social and political economic context and to pay attention to labour-management relations as well as organised labour and trade unions.

Note, for instance, the following criticism by Gouldner (1970: 82) of claims held by some industrial psychologists about the objectivity of research within their discipline which they claimed to be a neutral science:

“...the social science of a utilitarian culture always tends toward theoryless empiricism, in which the conceptualisation of problems is secondary and energies are instead given over to questions of measurement research or experimental design, sampling or instrumentation. A conceptual vacuum is thus created, ready to be filled by the common sense concerns and practical interests of clients, sponsors and research funders” (in Fullagar, 1984: 98).

Similarly, Webster (1976) argued in his criticism of the works of two prominent business consultants in the 1980s, Raymond Silberbauer and Peter Becker, who were hailed as experts on Africans and Africans’ affairs:

“Analytically the two writers are poverty-stricken. They lack any kind of theoretical framework which could lend strength to their arguments, and their presentation is consequently episodic, anecdotal, and relies entirely on apt illustration for the points being made. Silberbauer often prefaces his little homilies on worker communication by reference to ‘the African’. Becker veers wildly from personal anecdote to sweeping generalization; one wonders just how much weight one can attach to their assertions” (Webster, 1976: 53).



The above reviews reveal ignorance and shallow insight and understanding of black people and their cultures. This is no clearer than in their racist, paternalistic and ethnocentric assumptions and claims that black Africans, especially black African workers, are different and unaccustomed to “Western business philosophy” and the “white industrial social system”, and therefore that special interventions are required for them to be successfully integrated. According to Coldwell and Moerdyk (1981), black people generally experience a “paradigm conflict” due to the differences between traditional African cultural paradigms and modern Western managerial paradigms (Bloom, 1984: 136 and also refer to Coldwell, 1977).

These resultant racist attitudes towards black African workers by white managements were also captured by Nzimande (1991) who argues that in the 1950s, personnel functions within SA corporations were dual in nature. One, in the form of Personnel Departments was meant for white skilled workers understood to be “industrially mature”, and the other one in the form of Industrial Relations Departments meant for the black workers believed to be “largely comparable to conditions prevalent in England in Feudal times” and thus “uninitiated in the complexities of modern industrial life” (Nzimande, 1991: 160-161). Hence that Personnel Departments focused on skills training for white workers while Industrial Relations Departments focused mainly on selection, testing, absenteeism, labour turnover, health, and literacy for African workers (Nzimande, 1991: 161).

A similar perspective is outlined by Fullagar (1984) in his review and critique of Stanger(1962) as a rather inadequate account of industrial conflict as being attributable to distorted perceptions and emotions such as frustration and aggression, thus prescribing therapeutic forms of interventions. These interventions, rather than seeking to address the real underlying factors such as division of power and environmental determinants of behaviour, Fullagar argues, were aimed at ensuring that all participants develop a more accurate perception and understanding of others’ needs; at encouraging better communication; at being sympathetic listener; as well as at diffusing feelings of frustrations or aggression (Fullagar, 1984: 99).

Similar assumptions and claims about black Africans and their culture, and prescriptions on forms of intervention are highlighted in Webster (1976) in his review and critique of the works of Silberbauer and Becker. According to Webster, Silberbauer created an impression of African workers as being hide-bound by custom and that employers needed to understand this and accept it with patience and fortitude. Hence his advice for employers was that supervisors should be even-tempered as “the African is constantly on the look out for the influence of spirits” and that moody supervisors may “puzzle and worry the worker because it may seem to be due to the influence of evil spirit” (Webster, 1976: 54). Also noted with concern by Webster are ethnocentric assertions by Silberbauer and Becker that “blacks in town may lose their ‘moral compass’ and need to be shown a ‘firm moral example’ and also that “tribal workers (referring to black African workers) had difficulty in adjusting to the white man’s ways, and particularly his (white man) work patterns...” (Webster, 1976: 56 and 59)

Within the above racist, ethnocentric perspectives are stereotypes about blacks being seen as indolent, lazy, incompetent, unworthy, incapable of working with abstract concepts or numbers, colour-blind (meaning that they cannot draw distinctions between different colours), unintelligent, and so forth (Silberbauer, 1968 and Becker, 1974 in Webster, 1976; Maller, 1994; and Cock and Bernstein, 1998). This amounts to what Wilson and Klaaste (1996) refer to as the fundamental maxim of apartheid which says ‘whites are better and black are backward’ or even what Webster (1976) argued is the ethnocentrism that says “tribal life is a lower form of society, and that Western, urban ideals are the pinnacle of achievement”. It may be recalled that this kind of ethnocentrism about African cultures and traditions as well as thought systems was seriously challenged in chapter three of this study.

Backtracking to Ngubane (1963 and 1979), Gordon (1994), Moodie (1994) and Sitas (1996 and 1997), it could be noted that not only do their analyses and evidence support claims such as Mbigi and Maree’s that the ubuntu/botho culture has a positive role to play in socio-economic development of the contemporary SA society, but also evidence of the historical failure on the part of SA managements and successive governments under apartheid to successfully adopt and implement Western-modelled and Eastern-modelled strategies (e.g. workers participation in the form of quality

cycles and share-ownership schemes) in the workplace. The aim of these strategies was to help improve working relations, work performance, efficiency, productivity, as well as to introduce forms of workplace democracy. While under the pre-1994 South Africa, the failure of these strategies was attributed to the system of apartheid capitalism characterised by political and economic exclusion and marginalisation of the black people, in the post-1994 period this is being attributed to both the legacy of apartheid and the neo-liberal economic policy environment which only served to fuel adversarialism between employers and workers.

Research shows that under apartheid capitalism, concern with working to improve performance in the workplace was mainly a preoccupation of white employers, managements and the co-opted white workers (the latter constituting aristocratic working class that enjoyed privileges denied to black workers). Not only were black workers denied political rights as part of the broader black populace but also industrial citizenship rights in the workplace under racially discriminatory policies of apartheid. They were subjected to white oppression, repression, marginalisation and exploitation both in the workplace and beyond. This situation is best captured by Von Holdt (2003) through the concept of *apartheid workplace regime*, which he borrowed from Michael Burawoy (1985) and innovatively adapted to the South African context, to describe the racial structure of power in the workplace. This regime, he argues, “allocated skill and authority on a racial basis” and was “characterised by racial insults and racial assaults” (Von Holdt, 2003: 27). In this racial structure, he argues:

“The rightless and tightly controlled black workers, occupying the less skilled jobs, constituted a cheap labour force. The white workers, monopolising the skilled and supervisory jobs, constituted an expensive labour force. The racial division of labour replicated the broader class and racial inequalities of apartheid. Black hourly-paid workers and white hourly-paid workers were on separate payrolls, with different rates and benefits” (Von Holdt, 2003: 28)

This regime, Von Holdt (2003) argues, gave rise to a “*baaskap* racial culture” which turned factories into places of white power (leading to notions such as “a white man’s factory”) and black powerlessness, and whereby any white person, whether an employee or a manager, could issue instruction to black workers. As Von Holdt puts it:

“White men made the rules and the cardinal rule for black workers was to ‘obey that man’s rules’, however arbitrary or senseless” (Von Holdt, 2003: 3).

The regime and its *baaskap* racial culture were maintained through arbitrary dismissals of black workers for failure to comply, injection of fear and threat of violence. As he states:

“The absolute power of dismissal and the practice of racial assault underpinned white power and black powerlessness. The threat of violence, racial insults and the constantly re-enacted rituals of white superiority and black inferiority were woven into the fabric of workplace relations. The racial distribution of power in the workplace was not constructed in isolation from broader social structures beyond it. State control...” (Von Holdt, 2003: 38).

Sitas (1983) also discovered in the study conducted two decades before Von Holdt’s study, a similar kind of workplace regime and *baaskap* racial culture during interviews with black African metal workers who reported “... assaults by white supervisors or white workers and a readiness of all whites in the factory and some ‘impimpi’<sup>3</sup> indunas to resolve problems with beating and kicking and swearwords.” (Sitas, 1983: 305)

The *apartheid workplace regime* should be understood within the broader context of the regulatory system of the industrial relations in pre-democratic South Africa which has its roots in the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act (ICA). The legislative framework anchored in this 1924 Act created the dual system whereby black workers were denied labour rights and excluded from the industrial relations institutions such as industrial councils while their white, coloured and Indian counterparts enjoyed labour rights and their unions were legally recognised. Within this context of economic and political exclusion, black workers saw no point in cooperating with the white owned and run business sector, which was seen as simply an extension of the apartheid political regime. Thus, rather than seeking to work together with management in forging a common identity for the joint realisation of common goals, their main

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<sup>3</sup> Impimpi or mpimpi is word used in indigenous African languages (both in Nguni and Sotho languages) to refer to black informers of white regime (apartheid government informers were known as Askaris) and white managements (and the latter’s informers were mainly indunas and some black supervisors).

preoccupation came to be with the struggle to bring down the illegitimate system of apartheid and resistance to its attendant racial practices and measures in the workplace.

This is clearly illustrated in Von Holdt's studies of transition in the workplace and in trade unionism in SA as part of the broader transition from apartheid to democracy using the case study of Steelco, a South African steel factory. Reporting on the findings from responses of the black workers and their shopfloor representatives belonging to the then Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU), today known as the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA), Von Holdt (1996) found high levels of resistance to the racially structured workplace and racist practices by white workers and managers.

The resultant adversarial situation, which Von Holdt (1996) termed a "war of resistance" or "resistance politics", which featured in the entire SA labour relations situation and was aimed to destabilise the apartheid systems, its institutions and laws; turned out to be a major obstacle to any attempts by management to secure workers' co-operation on productivity matters. In Von Holdt's observation, "underlying the dramatic events of major strikes or stayaways was the daily challenge to the authority of the (*the white*) foreman, the superintendent, the divisional manager – the authority of the white man, the authority of apartheid." (Von Holdt, 1996: 14) This was further confirmed in interviews with the chairpersons of the Joint Shopsteward Committee and the Steel Works Committees, respectively, whose responses were as follows:

"The culture of resistance meant that at that time we were faced with the system of apartheid which was working hand-in-hand with the capitalist system, and naturally as the union we had to resist. One way of resisting was through industrial action ... At that time we were never concerned about the economy. In fact we wanted to see this economy suffering because it had no significance for us other than keeping the very system of apartheid alive ...

What you should preach to workers is that they must work as slowly as they can. They must not agree to do any other extra jobs, because we believe we are not paid. Mandela is still in prison ... We'll make sure that we work as slow as possible, we don't care, this is not our country" (Von Holdt, 1996: 14).

Resistance and the struggle by black workers' trade unions against the discriminatory systems were articulated through the concept of "social movement unionism." This was introduced by Lambert and Webster (1988) to describe trade unionism in SA in the 1980s. By social movement unionism, Lambert and Webster referred to the form of unionism that links production issues to wider political issues. This form of unionism, they argued, facilitates an active engagement in both factory-based, production politics and in community and state power issues (Lambert and Webster, 1988: 31). The apartheid capitalist system not only divided black and white workers but also created an environment of mistrust, suspicion, tensions and conflicts which strained the relations between white employers/managements, organised white workers, and organised black workers.

This environment, which prevailed throughout the apartheid era stretching from 1948 to 1994, and its attendant factors served as major obstacles to finding and developing workplace strategies to both foster cooperative relations and improve performance and efficiency. This continued to be so throughout the 1980s and 1990s despite the extension of legal recognition of black trade unions following the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations in 1980. Black people were still politically excluded. Strategies initiated within this period of apartheid by managements and government, but failed, include the 1950s and 1970s statutory works committees and liaison committees, the work study techniques and incentive bonus schemes in the 1970s, the statutory works councils in the early 1980s and the non-statutory participatory schemes between the late 1980s and early 1990s (Davies and Lewis, 1975: 65; Maree, 1985; Loet Douwes Dekker and Myburg, 1991; Mapadimeng, 1998).

The statutory works committees, the liaison committees and the works councils were introduced by the government as alternative structures of representation for African workers aimed to discourage the formation of trade unions. The works committees were introduced under the 1953 Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act as factory-based structures of representation aimed to stabilise relations between managements and African employees. In terms of the Act, the works committees were to be elected and constituted by African workers only. As Horner (1987:126) pointed out, the works committees were "intended to be a frontline communication channel between African workers on the one hand and their employer on the other" and



“...would be the first recourse if a dispute arose.” Despite the heavy state repression (which in the 1950s led to the political liberation movement comprised of both political and trade union organisations going underground and the liberation leadership being arrested, charged at the Rivonia Trial and imprisoned) creating a decade of relative peace in the 1960s, African trade unions continued to show some resilience as African workers overwhelmingly rejected the system of works committees.

The revival and resilience of African trade unions was evidenced by the 1973 Durban strikes which later spread throughout the country. These strikes, Maree and Budlender (1987) argue, signified the total ineffectiveness of the works committees as a communication channel for African workers’ grievances. To rescue the situation, they argue, the government, rather than extending trade union rights to African workers, amended the 1953 Act in 1973 making provisions for the establishment of liaison committees and sought to upgrade the works committees. The name of the Act was also changed to the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Act. In terms of the Act, the liaison committees were to serve as plant-level structures in which both management and African workers were to be represented, and where they existed no works committees could be established.

Interestingly, and as would be expected under the conditions of the time, managements tended to prefer the liaison committees over the works committees, whereas African workers preferred the latter over the former. This could be seen from the disparity in the number of the works committees that were established as opposed to that of the liaison committees. By 1977, only 301 works committees had been set up as against the 2 503 liaison committees (Maree and Budlender, 1987: 118). This, they argue, was also revealed by the study conducted in mid-1974 by Verster on the constitution and functioning of both the liaison and works committees.

In that study, Verster found that in approximately 91 per cent of cases, the initiative to set up the liaison committee was taken by management. The study also found that management preferred the liaison committees as they perceived them as “anti-polarisation” devices that conferred benefits such as better guidance by management and prompt solution to problems, and thus improved two-way communication. The



study also found that the liaison committees, unlike the works committees, did not resemble trade unions and also were consultative as opposed to negotiating bodies (Horner, 1987: 132). The study found that the workers found the works committees preferable as they were more effective, representative and acceptable than the liaison committees (Horner, 1987: 133).

The workers' acceptance of the works committees, Maree and Budlender (1987) argue, was in fact a tactical move to temporarily use the committees to gain shop-floor representation and advance their organisational strength, in order to eventually launch trade unions. This, they argue, signified the failure of the state policy. The rejection of the committee system led to further government intervention with the intention to repress the apparently resilient African trade unions, which demanded legal recognition, and also to regain control over African workers. The 1979 Wiehahn Commission, which was appointed by the government to investigate labour legislation, recommended that, in order to best enhance control, the government should extend legal recognition to African trade unions. This it did through amendments to the labour legislation in 1979 and later introducing the new Act in the form of the Labour Relations Amendment Act in 1981. The Act brought to an end the racially dual system of industrial relations, and provided the African unions with access to industrial courts. This, Maree and Budlender argue, came against the background of rapid growth in unregistered African trade unions which placed companies under immense pressure, resulting in company level recognition agreements outside of the industrial councils. In fact, the legal recognition of African unions provided them with enough space to wage further struggles against the apartheid capitalist system and its injustices through their access to the industrial court, thus helping to further strengthen the unions. This can be noticed from Maree and Budlender remark that:

“Contrary to earlier expectations, the industrial court initially delivered numerous judgements that increased workers' rights at the work-place and thus strengthened trade unions in relation to management. It did so mainly by rulings on unfair labour practices ... In its first few years of existence the court delivered hard blows against victimisation of union members, arbitrary dismissals and retrenchments of workers, and the non-recognition of representative trade unions, regardless of whether the unions were registered or not” (Maree and Budlender, 1987: 121).

It is clear that during the 1970s, cooperation with white employers and managements as well as the white minority government was not a priority for organised African workers, as their main preoccupation was with reviving their unions and securing recognition for collective bargaining purposes as well as challenging the repressive, unjust system of racial discrimination. Within this context, I would argue, attempts by both the government and managements to co-opt and seek to create cooperative relations with African workers were deemed to fail, as could be seen from the experiences with the works and liaison committees. This was also so with other workplace measures taken by management in the 1970s in the form of traditionally repressive works study techniques and the incentive bonus schemes to enhance performance, efficiency and productivity.

An outline of some of those strategies and the factors that led to their failure was provided by Maller (1987), in her paper that examines the question of productivity in SA. During the 1970s, Maller argues, SA managements in various industrial enterprises introduced the traditionally repressive measure of control in the form of scientific management. This entailed the use of work study techniques for setting labour productivity standards which were comprised of time and motion studies through which standard time required for the completion of the job is determined. According to Maller (1987: 322), the widespread use of work study techniques in SA industrial sectors, mainly in large companies employing not less than 1000 workers, was uncovered through a survey of 200 companies conducted by the Work Study Association, the professional association of work study practitioners. As Maller points out, the repressive nature of this technique has traditionally made it a subject of conflict between management and unions.

In SA too, this was not any different as these techniques were met with a similar response from labour unions. The unions' main concern was that work study methods were usually used by managements as part of the rationalization programs of the organizations. This often resulted in workers being laid off in order to cut on labor costs. This was confirmed by the survey's findings that between 1985 and 1986, 45 per cent of the companies surveyed have retrenched their workers while 36 per cent have reduced numbers by natural wastage, and 21 per cent redeployed excess employees, with only 7 per cent having increased their employment levels and 16 per

cent reporting no changes in their numbers (Maller 1987:323). Another shortfall of this technique is its usage of traditional methods for work measurement and labour performance monitoring such as stop-watch measurement (78% of the companies surveyed reported its usage) and synthetic or standard data to measure work (used by 43% of the surveyed companies). This, she argues, has resulted in the neglecting of total enterprise productivity (Maller, 1987: 322).

The resultant conflict relations between management and the unions were exacerbated by the introduction of the incentive bonus schemes. Like the work study techniques, the incentive bonus schemes were found to be widespread and introduced in most of the companies surveyed (52%). The main target group for these schemes was production workers. Through these schemes, managements aimed to instil motivation in black workers, as they were excluded in the past, and thus encourage them to improve their performance and productivity. This approach to performance and productivity enhancement was, according to Maller (1987), used by management in an attempt to address wage questions by directly linking wages to productivity. This, however, was met with resistance and created negative perceptions amongst black trade unions. In their view, the incentive bonus schemes only managed to encourage corruption and favouritism and were often too low to effectively motivate the workers. They felt that wages should be linked with the cost of living and not with productivity (Maller, 1987:325).

This criticism from the unions, Maller argues, came in the light of the failure of bonus schemes to reach the large portion of the workers as only few managed to reach the bonus targets on a regular basis, thus rendering the schemes ineffective as a factor of motivation. Furthermore, the schemes were weakened by the absence of constant work load due to economic recession and workers' perception that managements introduce such schemes only in times of difficulties and that this shows a lack of good faith.

The unions' resistance to work study techniques and incentive bonus schemes was exacerbated by the unilateral manner in which they have been introduced by management. They demanded greater involvement through negotiations with the management over production related issues and mechanism for addressing them. This

would, according to the unionists, not only enable them to ensure that any changes introduced are legitimate and acceptable, but would also provide workers with an opportunity to become active players in performance and productivity enhancement initiatives. This is supported by the response of a Cosatu spokesperson when interviewed by *Finance Week* (22-28, 05, 1986) in which he said:

“We are not interested in the kind of paternalism where a decision is taken, for example to introduce new technology, and management comes to the union to discuss the effects, i.e. retrenchments. We want to be consulted first.” (Maller, 1987:327-8)

This is an indication of organized black workers’ challenge of the racial discrimination and exclusion in the workplace.

In response to the failure of these schemes and the continued conflict with black workers, which negatively impacted productivity and performance, managements in most SA enterprises begin to experiment with participatory schemes in the period of the late 1980s and 1990s, the period in which black workers gained legal rights and legal recognition for their unions. Amongst such enterprises are the Premier Milling Group (Barret, 1993); Jabula Foods, Volkswagen SA, and Cashbuild (Maller, 1992); Harmony Gold Mine (Webster, 1995; Mapadimeng, 1998); Ngodwana Paper Mill (Bethlehem, 1991). The key objective for managements’ introduction of these schemes was to create stable workplace relations by forging co-operation with black workers and their unions around production issues.

The participatory schemes introduced to achieve the above objective and improve efficiency and performance, like the work study techniques and the incentive bonus schemes before them, failed. This was attributed to a several factors, all of which linked to the broader apartheid system. Studies examining those factors found that while some managements tried hard to avoid the unilateral imposition of the participatory schemes by involving workers’ representatives in their formulation, once the schemes have been implemented, unilateralism continued to persist on decision makings. For instance, in my research at Harmony Gold mine, whereby I examined the participatory scheme, I discovered that in spite of the successful joint establishment by management and workers’ representatives of the Harmony Mine

Forum at the workplace level for joint discussion and resolving of production-related issues, management however failed to avoid domination over decision makings within the forum (Mapadimeng, 1998).

Coupled with this was management's unwillingness to co-operate in good faith with workers' representatives and their continuation of unilateral practices within the forum and over decision makings (also see Barret's case study of Premier Group and Maller's case study of Jabula Foods). This constrained efforts to establish co-operative and equitable relations in the workplace and instead created a perception amongst workers' representatives that the management is using the forum to advance its narrow interests at the expense of the workers. Hence this response by one of the workers' representatives within the forum at Harmony Gold Mine:

"The forum is used only when there is a crisis, it is only effective on management's interests and we do not believe that such should continue to happen. I am not happy about the forum's operation because the management uses forums for information purposes and only when it suits its needs. For example, the application of Sunday work - we never had a joint decision. They just came with it. Management uses such tactics lots of times."(Mapadimeng, 1998: 96)

Management's lack of good faith was further exacerbated by the absence of institutionalized, regulatory framework to guide co-operative efforts between the two parties and to ensure that jointly made decisions are adhered to and implemented as agreed upon. The absence of such institutional framework has, according to Webster and Macun (1997), left the participatory schemes ambiguous, providing only consultative representation falling short of real co-determination. Hence, that the schemes typified Pateman's *partial participation* which refers to a situation whereby two or more parties influence each other in making decisions but the final power to determine the outcome of decisions lies with one party (Mapadimeng, 1998:97).

The above view is shared by Maller (1987) in her argument that the inclusion of black workers in production decisions failed to transcend quality circles. Quality circles are small problem-solving groups of workers within the same departments or work sections which meet regularly to solve production-related problems. Their main objective is to encourage workers to identify with the company objectives and

motivate them to enhance their performance. Quality circles were however received with suspicion by black unions. While the latter admitted that quality circles recognize workers' mental capabilities, and are a sign of respect for workers and allow them participation in their jobs' decision makings, they however feared that they might be used by management to bypass the unions while co-opting workers into cooperating in productivity enhancing initiatives (Maller, 1987). Bethlehem (1991: 51-53) also discovered in her research at Ngodwane Paper Mill that the 'Green Areas' project introduced to improve communication between workers and management as well as to tap into workers' knowledge of production, failed to achieve these objectives as they tended to be used by management in a top-down fashion as briefing sessions to exert control over the workers. The failure of these management strategies suggests that the questions of work performance, efficiency and productivity were still left inadequately addressed. This, as was noted, was largely due to the broader socio-economic and political system of apartheid which created conditions and practices within the workplace not conducive to worker-management co-operation.

The question that needs to be addressed is whether the political transition from apartheid to democracy has had any positive influence on the practices and attitudes in the SA workplaces and the broader labour relations? What implications does this have for workplace strategies to improve performance and productivity? Most of the evidence arising from the research conducted in the 1990s and particularly in the post-apartheid period suggest that despite the new political environment, the legacies of the past and slow transformation process still impact strongly on the present and on efforts to improve the economy in SA. The release of political prisoners and the unbanning of the liberation movement comprised of the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan African Congress (PAC), and the Azanian Peoples Organization (AZAPO) in 1990 by the former National Party following decades of fierce political struggle and the beginning of multi-party talks created conditions for political change.

Within this context of imminent political changes, accompanied by the lifting of sanctions by the international community, many SA companies began to feel the pressure of outside economic competition. This was particularly so as the ANC and its allies, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) had stipulated in their national policy blue print, the



Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) that tariffs and protectionist policies should be scrapped under the future democratic system in order for SA to compete in the international markets. While caution is being taken not to overexpose sensitive local businesses, this stance which promotes tariffs reduction and outward-orientated trade and industrial policy has been retained in the macro-economic policy, Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) which came to replace the RDP.

Thus the post-apartheid dispensation has exposed most of the SA business organizations to outside pressures and competition. In a desperate attempt to respond to and counter those pressures as well as to enhance global competitiveness, most SA major business organizations adopted the strategies of flexibilization. They did so in spite of the previous failed management strategies and without addressing the constraints that led to the failure of those strategies. Little attention has also been paid to contentious nature of the concept of flexibility which has been subject of intense debate. Within debates on this concept, distinctions were drawn between different variants of flexibility and approaches required to achieve flexibility were identified. Three basic distinctions of flexibility drawn are: *numerical or employment flexibility*, *functional or work flexibility* and *wage flexibility* (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Pollert, 1988a and 1988b; Currey, 1993; Macun, 1997; Standing, 1999; and Bezuidenhout and Kenny, 1999).

*Numerical/employment flexibility* entails flexible size of the workforce and contractual relations between the workers and employers. *Functional/work flexibility*, on the other hand, refers to flexibility in work organization and technology used - which may require amongst others a multi-skilled workforce, job-rotation and team work; whereas *wage flexibility* entails a change in, and often reduction, of pay/wage rates and working conditions (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Pollert, 1988; Currey, 1993; Macun, 1997: 2; Bezuidenhout and Kenny, 1999: 4). In addition to the above three types of flexibility, Bezuidenhout and Kenny (1999) argue that there is the fourth typology which they call *work time* flexibility and refers to flexibility in working time patterns which may take the form of shift systems, part-time work or temporal work (Bezuidenhout and Kenny, 1999: 4).



Central to the debates on the concept and strategies of flexibility is the argument that flexibility has been employed by industrial and business organizations to respond and adapt to changing conditions in which they are operating. Hence, the concept is viewed as useful for assessing the potential and ability of individuals and organizations to “efficiently adjust their goals and resources to changing constraints and opportunities.” (Killick, 1995 quoted in Macun, 1997:2) Macun thus argues that flexibility or adaptability as he refers to it was viewed by industrial organizations as “a precondition for success and growth”. Highlighting a similar sentiment is James Curry (1993: 99) in his observation that “industries and firms everywhere are said to be leaving behind the old, tired, rigid, boring, inefficient, staid past and entering into the new, highly efficient, diverse, exciting, and *flexible*, future; and if they are not, they should be”. Hence that “flexible specialisation is also touted as the cure for the sclerosis of big firms” (Stinchcombe, 1987, quoted in Curry, 1993: 99).

Also underlying this debate and identified as another rationale behind the notion and strategies of flexibility, are claims that these strategies, together with the accompanying high technology, have a positive effect on workers through skills enhancement and greater workers engagement, integration and work satisfaction (Piore and Sabel, 1989 quoted in Curry, 1993: 111). These claims are however challenged through counter-arguments that point to evidence which leads not only to the questioning of the extent to which firms have really become flexible but also the effects of flexibility on workers. Drawing from empirical evidence presented by Murray (1987) and Amin (1989) on Third Italy (conglomeration of small firms) and also by Koshiro (1990) on some small firms in Japan, Curry (1993) for instance argues that in all these conglomerations, there is little, if any evidence, that suggest the presence of small craft production or flexibility with desirable positive effects on workers. Rather, he argues, this evidence shows that these small firms, unlike their large counterparts, have been characterised by large wage differentials and numerical flexibility; deteriorating working conditions; increased labour market segmentation and inequality; resources bottlenecks; and decline in profitability and lack of innovation. Note here his argument that:

“It is hard to be confident about flexible specialisation as an actually existing phenomenon. Where it is said to exist the evidence indicates that it either does not really exist there, or that

it existed for only a relatively brief historical moment and is now in the process of transforming itself, or being transformed, into something not- flexible specialisation. In large industries with core significance to the global economy flexibility is becoming important, but this flexibility is certainly not craft production” (Currey, 1993: 106).

Dismissing the notion of flexibility as nothing more than fetishism, Curry proceeds to argue that any “claim that a post-modern, post-industrial, post-fordist, or post-capitalist society is creating, and will necessitate, a ‘return’ to craft production is, like many of the celebratory claims for postmodernism, a dubious notion”(Curry, 1993:110).

This criticism is validated by evidence arising from the SA experience whereby most firms and industrial enterprises that adopted flexibility as a strategy for enhancing performance, efficiency, productivity and competitiveness tended to favour *numerical, wage and work time* forms of flexibilities. This was established through the 1995 South African Labour Flexibility Survey (SALFS) conducted in the manufacturing sector of the economy with a focus being on, amongst others, the metals, engineering, textiles and garments, chemicals, food processing, and the paper and printing sub-sectors (see Macun, 1997:3). The survey discovered that firms within this sector had experienced employment growth of only 1, 6 per cent to 2, 8 per cent between 1995 and 1996. This was so despite their introduction of technological innovations (i.e. product, capital and work process innovations) and numerical/employment flexibility(i.e. firms being able to employ from outside labour market with few restrictions from labour legislations and others freely employing low paid temporary labour - contract or part time- with less benefits). More than 80 per cent of the surveyed firms were found to have employed temporary/casual employees between 1995 and 1996 (Macun, 1997:4).

Macun thus argues that these findings suggest that SA has a highly flexible labour market. This is a view that is also shared by other researchers such as Standing according to whom “South Africa has a flexible labour market. In some respects it may be too flexible...It is almost comical to describe SA as having employment inflexibility. Many workers have little employment protection, retrenchments are fairly easy and widespread, notice periods are short or non-existent, and most firms

can resort to temporary or casual labour and, if need be, labour contracting - the world's most flexible labour system and spreading like wildfire"(*Business Day*, 1996:12, quoted by Kenny and Bezuidenhout, 1999:2).

Labour market flexibility, or what others term labour sub-contracting or casualisation, was also discovered to be at rapid increase within the SA mining sector during the 1990s. According to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) Report entitled "Outsourcing mine jobs reaches alarming proportions", casualisation within the coal mining sub-sector has increased from 5 per cent to 16 per cent between 1987 and 1998, and in the gold sub-sector it has seen a rise from 3 per cent to 10 per cent of the total workforce between 1987 and 1997/98 (see [www.num.org.za/news/num-minejobs.html](http://www.num.org.za/news/num-minejobs.html), 10-04-2000:1-2). While companies are said to be citing a "drive for higher productivity, flexibility and cost cutting" as the reasons for utilizing sub-contracted or casual labour, research findings suggest that contrary to these claims, labour casualisation is used by companies as a strategy for circumventing wages and unionized workers' working conditions ([www.num.org.za/news/num-minejobs.html](http://www.num.org.za/news/num-minejobs.html), 2000:1), as well as a tool of control by managements over workers (Kenny and Bezuidenhout, 1999:3).

In his review of the discussions around industrial restructuring and flexibility, Macun(1995) identifies three strategies that can be used to achieve restructuring and flexibility. Two of those strategies are what Sengenberger (1992) has labelled the "low road" and "high road" to industrial restructuring. The "low road" is said to be aligned to wage flexibility as it is based on temporary or permanent wage reductions and relaxation of work rules and working conditions; whereas the "high road" is associated with functional flexibility as it is based on the pursuit of improved efficiency and innovation through union-employer co-operation (Macun, 1995:7-8).

According to Macun, these strategies have inherent shortcomings which render them a non-viable option for the pursuit of effective restructuring and greater flexibility. Although he fails to specify, he argues that in its research, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has discovered that the "low road" strategy, used in many African countries during the 1980s and 1990s as a low-cost approach which emphasizes reduction in wages and non-wage costs rather labour productivity, has

failed to yield increased employment levels (Macun, 1995:7). According to Macun (1995:8), the danger of the “high road” strategy is that although it holds the potential to lead to improved wages and other rewards, it may however also result in the entrenchment of inequalities between organized permanent workers on the one hand; and temporary, lower-skilled casual or contract workers on the other.

The third strategy, which is in stark contrast with the above two and is seen as a viable alternative, was developed by the ILO and labelled by Standing (1996) as “*dynamic efficiency*”. This strategy entails the pursuit of greater flexibility through competition between two strong partners who are simultaneously rivals and co-operative (Macun, 1995:8). Hence, Macun’s argument that the viability of this strategy as an alternative to both the “low road” and the “high road” derives from the fact that the pursuit of improved productivity and profitability is balanced with practices of social and economic equity as well as labour security (Macun, 1995:8). This, argues Macun, is made possible by the strong emphasis laid on the need to have competition between strong bargaining partners which is likely to reduce conflicts as the concerns and views of both partners would have been considered in decision makings.

As mentioned already, SA enterprises tended to favour the “low road” strategy which took the forms of the wage and numerical flexibilities. The problem encountered with this approach though is that unlike both the “high road” and “dynamic efficiency” strategies, and particularly the latter strategy which seeks to achieve both equity and improved productivity through co-operation between labour and employers, the “low road” strategy is more of a cost-cutting approach which is often unilaterally imposed and repressive of labour. The nature of this approach implies increased job insecurity for permanent workers through retrenchments and numerical flexibility as labour costs cutting strategies and intensified exploitation resulting from wage reductions and the lowering of working conditions. All these are more likely to fuel conflicts and derail efforts to work towards the achievement of improved performance, efficiency and productivity.

This strategy failed bring transformation to the workplace which Von Holdt describes as the *apartheid workplace regime* characterized by racial inequality (a SALFS survey found that African workers occupy mainly the lower ranks of the job structure

with few in technical and managerial positions), adversarialism (42 per cent surveyed firms had experienced industrial action over the recent period of the survey), and a low investment in the skills of black workers (the survey found that only few firms offered their workers formal training) which resulted in black workers refusing to identify with the goals of industrial enterprises (Macun, 1997: 6). Thus, for Macun, the “low road” strategy and its resultant numerical and wage flexibilities, has proven to be self-defeating as it failed to enable the firms to successfully adapt to the new challenging conditions which require low conflicts, equity and co-operation, greater performance, efficiency, innovation, high productivity and competitiveness.

Macun attributes the failure of this strategy to its inherent inability to enable the industrial enterprises to effectively address and overcome the constraints imposed by the past legacy, and particularly those that have to do with human resource development and the industrial relations (Macun, 1997: 7 and 9). For him, a viable alternative to these strategies of restructuring and flexibility would be the ILO’s *dynamic efficiency*. Its viability, he argues, lies in its emphasis on the need to strike a balance between competing interests of equity and efficiency provides an appropriate framework within which the above constraints would be effectively addressed (Macun, 1997:9). Within such a framework, Macun argues, improved efficiency and performance can be enhanced through policy interventions that bolster the institutional capacity of firms and provide incentives to those firms that are striving to achieve and are moving towards the goals of equity and efficiency, rather than policies that seek to simply reduce production costs (Macun, 1997: 9). This, he however argues, should be balanced with the adequate support for trade unions. The idea here would be to ensure that both employers and trade unions are strong bargaining partners that can negotiate and reach consensus on the appropriate strategies for restructuring and flexibility aimed at achieving a balance between equity and efficiency.

This argument by Macun reinforces the earlier one he developed on labour productivity, in which he dismissed the overemphasis on ‘high skills’ as being crucial to the enhancement of productivity and performance. Although he acknowledges that skills are essential to labour productivity enhancement, especially when ‘high skills’ which require extensive specialized training are balanced with basic skills of

numeracy and literacy, he however argues that central to labour productivity is the question of *effort*. Individual workers' effort and performance, he argues, determine "how much activity workers engage in, the pace and the quality of work that goes into various activities" (Macun, 1995: 51).

As effort requires motivation to work, Macun sees effort as partly being achievable through improved wages for workers and other forms of remuneration such as profit-sharing schemes as incentives for workers to improve effort. While he acknowledges that it is the management's responsibility to improve productivity and create a motivating environment for the workers, he however stresses the point that trade unions have an equally vital role to play in performance and productivity enhancing initiatives (Macun, 1995: 52). The unions, he argues, are seen as being vital in the improvement of efficiency through the reduction in labour turnover of workers, thus helping to lower recruitment and training costs and also through their role in training schemes for improved human resources policies.

Macun argues that this should be supplemented by increased workers' control over their daily jobs, which is even easier to achieve where the workers are multi-skilled as it would ensure greater flexibility. Hence, his argument that "an emphasis on responsibility and control is likely to enhance motivation and effort as it begins to decentralize authority in firms and places more reliance on the status of people in their work and less on traditional hierarchical systems." (Macun, 1995: 53) He argues further that all these can be enhanced by good industrial relations characterised by co-operative relationships between management and the unions, especially on production issues, appropriate remuneration levels, job security, and acceptable working conditions.

While Macun has developed what seems to be a persuasive argument on the approach and strategy needed to achieve equity and efficiency in the workplace, these would be hampered by the deeply entrenched negative, adversarial perceptions and attitudes prevalent within most SA workplaces. For instance, while the idea of policy intervention for facilitating workplace restructuring is no doubt good, it is however likely to be perceived by white employers and managers as undesirable and too interfering with the normal running of business. The recent testimony to this is



the negative reaction that the Employment Equity Act has received from the white business community and white liberal political parties such as the Democratic Party<sup>4</sup> who perceive it as arbitrary, imposing and interventionist. While I agree with Macun that increased worker control over the production process would also contribute significantly towards equity and efficiency, I do however think that the success of such a contribution would largely be dependent on how the workers and trade unions themselves perceive worker control. In view of the fact that black trade unions have fought for worker control and against management unilateral domination in the workplace over the past decades, there is a danger that black workers and their unions may view increased worker control as simply a victory for the working class and as not necessarily imposing on them the responsibility over production.

A signal to this was the trade unions' refusal to trigger workplace forums as provided for by the Labour Relations Act to encourage both workers and employers to co-operate on production issues while restricting collective bargaining to distributive issues, preferably beyond the workplace. An example here is the resolution by the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (Numsa), a key affiliate of South Africa's major trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), taken at its 1996 National Congress held at the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park. At this congress, Numsa's resolution recommended to all other Cosatu affiliates not to trigger workplace forums and that instead of getting involved in co-determination structures, they should fight for the extension of collective bargaining to production-related issues and to those issues that have all the time been the management prerogative. Hence, its resolution that "as a union, they should put forward a programme of workplace democratisation which is in line with their ideal of workers control" (Numsa's National Congress, 1996)

This adversarialism is being exacerbated by the current lack of agreement between employers and trade unions on the appropriate joint strategy to counter pressures exerted by globalisation and reverse the growing unemployment, and the unilateral workplace restructuring by managements through the introduction of numerical, time

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<sup>4</sup>The Democratic Party has since formed an alliance or coalition with other small white liberal parties into the Democratic Alliance to present a strong opposition political party to the ruling African National Congress (ANC).



and wage flexibilities. Workers' resistance to unilateral restructuring processes introduced and led by managements and employers has taken the form of annual nation-wide protests and marches. An example of these protest marches was the May 10, 2000 national strike led by Cosatu during which Cosatu demanded urgent steps to proactively resolve the unemployment crisis in SA. The following demands were tabled by Cosatu: making retrenchments a mandatory issue for negotiations; protection of workers in the event of liquidation; halting the unilateral restructuring of government assets; an end to accelerated reduction of trade tariffs, and lack of job creation(*The Star*, 11 May 2000:1 and 5).

Cosatu's president, Willie Madisha, also called for a halt to capital flight which he saw as being encouraged by the South African Chamber of Business(Sacob)'s affiliates which he claimed had invested R80 billion outside SA between 1994 and 1998 (*The Star's Business Report*, 11 May 2000:1). Cosatu's chairperson is reported to have described this action as not a strike but "a war against poverty and joblessness", while in contrast the opposition Democratic Party leader, Tony Leon, interpreted it as a "strike against labour flexibility and privatisation" which could "propel economic growth to a rate high enough to create more jobs" (*The Star's Business Report*, 11 May 2000: 1 and 5). The South African Communist Party (SACP)'s media officer, on the other hand, viewed the action as "a conscious offensive against capitalism" (*The Star's Business Report*, 11 May 2000:5).

This evidence suggests that the gap between employers and trade unions remains wide and is thus likely to remain a major obstacle to workplace co-operation and possibilities of joint decision makings on issues of common interest. It is also important to note that racial attitudes and tensions are also still pervasive as could be noted from the following response by Cosatu member, Theo Matshiki, in Alrode during the strike. He said, "I wonder if the government can take action at floor level in private companies where there is a lot of exploitation. If a worker makes a mistake, they are quick to dismiss you. They then go to employment agencies for replacement, most of whom do not recommend black people for posts" (*The Star's Business Report*, 11 May 2000: 5).

Further evidence of the prevalence of racial differences and tensions which impair the possibilities of co-operative relations within the South African firms is borne by several of Numsa's press releases on the situation in the steel sector. In a press release entitled "Legal strike looming at Ferrometals and Columbus steel companies" in response to the two companies' reported failure to address racism, to prepare the implementation of the Employment Equity Act and plans to close furnaces divisions leading to job losses, Numsa's national sector co-ordinator Stephen Nhlapho described the union's planned strike action as a response to this failure as "... the last remedy left to the workers to deal with *baaskap* and boer mafia attitudes"(Numsa Press Release, 25-May-1999).

Similar sentiments and accounts of the situation were expressed in a press release entitled "ISCOR restructuring misguided and failed to produce result". In this report, which was a response to the company's restructuring programme called "Apollo" aimed to transform the head office, Numsa regarded the programme as more of an attempt by the regrouping old "*broederbond syndicate*" running the company in a "boere Mafia" style, to recreate "the old apartheid structure" in which white Afrikaner males dominate and blacks are marginalised (Numsa Press Release, 17-November-1999). This clearly spells out in some bold ways the pervasive nature of racial differences and perceptions as well as adversarialism within most of South Africa's workplaces, stemming from the past apartheid legacies, which hampers efforts to achieve effective workplace change and improved efficiency, performance and productivity.

It is against this background of the consistent failed efforts, both in the long and recent past, to achieve the above goals that it becomes imperative to explore alternative workplace strategies that could help to overcome the historical constraints and obstacles as outlined above. This is even more in the light of the pressures exerted on the SA economy by globalisation processes, and in particular intensifying competition. Can the integration of the ubuntu values into the workplace management strategies for improved performance serve as a viable alternative approach? Earlier on, it was noted from the review that there is a widely held view that harnessing of the indigenous culture of ubuntu and its values could benefit South Africans in the post-

apartheid era, especially in the light of the historical and continued failures to bring about viable change in the management of industrial enterprises.

I have so far argued, in the light of evidence arising from the review above which reveals the actual influence that the ubuntu/botho cultural values and principles have always had influence and continue to do so on the lives of black South Africans, that there is indeed a strong backing for the claims that ubuntu/botho culture could be tapped into a developmental and transformative force in today's SA. This notwithstanding, some serious concerns have been raised about the idea of integrating the ubuntu/botho cultural values and principles into the workplace. Some potential constraints to such integration can also be identified. The section below will provide an outline of those concerns and constraints, and examine whether or not other measures or approaches exist that could be adopted to enhance the achievement of the desired outcomes of such integration.

#### **4.3. Concerns, Potential Constraints and Opportunities to Ubuntu/Botho in the Workplace – What can be done?**

Notwithstanding the widely held viewpoint and the strongly supportive evidence, other analysts such as Mdluli (1987), have however expressed some serious concerns, despite their agreement with this viewpoint. Mdluli (1987)'s main concern, which he presented in a form of criticism, is that the dominant groups such as political leaders have a tendency to manipulate the ubuntu values to further their narrow interests, as was proven by past experiences under the apartheid South Africa. He argues that the ubuntu value system is prone to manipulation by those in authority positions, in his words the "African bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie", in furtherance of narrow interests that often disadvantages the poor. Basing his argument on the past experiences in South Africa under the apartheid Bantustan system, particularly the Zululand Bantustan, (today Kwa-Zulu Natal province) whereby Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) introduced the ubuntu-botho school syllabus, Mdluli warns against the dangers of the dominant groups' tendency to use ubuntu in the name of the poor masses to legitimize their own hegemonies. Such manipulative tendencies are not any different from those that saw the use of Bible to justify "all shades of ideologies and practices" (Mdluli,

1987:64-5). Expressing the same concern is Lodge (2002) in his review of the debates on and calls for African Renaissance whereby specific focus is drawn to ubuntu culture. While he finds the concept of ubuntu desirable since it “expresses compassionate social etiquette which, if everybody adhered to it, would make life most agreeable,” he however cautions against the tendencies “to invoke tradition to justify oppression and cruelty” (Lodge, 2002: 235). According to him:

“Tradition is summoned to justify the persecution of homosexuals in Zimbabwe and many other places; tradition is used to defend the absence of democratic representation in Swaziland as well as the extraordinary royal investment corporation, the Tibiyo Taka Nqwana; tradition is used to justify the minor status of south African women in the former homelands; and traditions is employed whenever African rules arrogate power and resources to themselves and their clients.” (Lodge, 2002: 235).

Given this, Lodge therefore finds it difficult to seek to develop a political order on the basis of collective solidarities as that would or could undermine fundamental civil liberties. This, he argues, is particularly so since “... not all traditional belief systems are egalitarian or benign” (Lodge, 2002: 235).

That the abuses of cultural values and traditional practices do occur can also be seen from the account provided by Sitas (1997) of what he terms a “peculiar colonial managerialism” that existed and was practised in industrial enterprises in the region of Natal (now incorporated into KwaZulu-Natal). This form of managerialism, which gave rise to what he calls “benevolent dictatorship with a strict hierarchy of races” (the phrase is borrowed from van den Berghe, 1964), was characterised by “the coexistence of ‘scientific management’ and bureaucratic forms of control alongside such ‘indirect rule’, ‘tribal’, or ‘traditional’ forms of consent and coercion” (Sitas, 1997: 102-103).

Pointing out the challenge that faced sociologists and other social scientists interested in the field of industrial and labour studies, he argues:

“We thus needed to understand a managerialism which was bifocal: ‘there was the world of white managers, artisans and workers (and to a lesser extent of ‘Indians and Coloureds’) which was governed by ‘modern’ statutes and collective bargaining. There was also the world

of black workers and 'Zulus' which over and above the segregationist statute of the Apartheid years, was also governed by 'traditional' authorities. This style of governance of people at work, we can label 'colonial managerialism'. A managerialism that ruled African workers differently and elicited traditional forms of control to maximise its modernised benefits." (Sitas, 1997: 102)

Sitas' argument resonates with the analysis by Von Holdt (2003) of the "racial structure of power of the workplace" in South Africa which he captures through the concept of the "apartheid workplace regime". According to Von Holdt, due to social distance created between blacks and whites by the apartheid system, which manifested itself partly through language gap whereby white supervisors could hardly speak African indigenous languages and most black workers speak a little English or Afrikaans; white managers found themselves compelled to find alternative ways of communicating with their black workforce in order to enforce control over black workers. As he points out, white managers "needed black eyes, ears and hands to ensure effective communication, and to police black workers in the thickets of their language and social networks, to which they could always retreat in order to frustrate white authority"(Von Holdt, quoted in Webster, 1985:124).

To achieve this alternative means of communication and control or policing of workers, white managers created another layer of control in the form of *indunas/izinduna*, a Zulu word which is used for referring to "a village headman or military leader, a leader rooted in the traditional institutions of leadership" (Von Holdt, 2003: 35). This layer of control constituted part of the factory regime that had as its elements: the *factory compounds* located on factory premises and managed by *white compound managers* assisted by the *black izinduna*, the *municipal compounds* located away from the factories and workplaces, and the *white foremen* on factories shopfloors assisted by African *boss-boys* (Nzimande, 1991: 166 and 173). According to Nzimande (1990), in seeking to bridge the language gap between the white management and black workers as well as to enhance control over the latter, it was required that the compound managers understand African culture and languages. Hence "the philosophy underlying these factories was that the most important thing required to win the allegiance and commitment of African workers was an

understanding of their ‘customs and habits’ and an ability to communicate in African languages” (Nzimande, 1991: 167-168).

The *izinduna*, as the right-hand men for factory-based compound managers, Nzimande argues, were tasked to help with recruitment and selection of workers, ensuring that they are disciplined and compliant (especially as recruits were from the same communities as *izinduna*). They were required to look after their welfare (this was made easy since *izinduna* lived with workers in the compounds and were enmeshed in their social lives, thus becoming a key link of communication with the management on any problems that affected workers to find solutions thereto). The *boss-boys*’ main function was, according Nzimande, to pass work instructions to workers and supervise them on a daily basis.

While in factory-based compounds, workers came from the same communities, making the *izinduna*’s task relatively easy, the same could not be said of workers in municipality compounds who, Nzimande argues, were from different places and were exposed to trade unions and liberation organisations’ influences, making it difficult to subjugate them to managerial control. To address this situation and ensure that these workers were under control, the state and municipal authorities under the Native Affairs Department (NAD) developed strategies of control, drawing once again on the indigenous cultural and traditional practices. Using the case of KwaZulu-Natal region in the 1950s (formerly known simply as just Natal), and especially Durban (today known as the eThekweni municipality area), Nzimande’s research found that those strategies included the following three:

- The exploitation by the NAD, of the image and social standing of the Zulu Royal Family amongst the Zulu workers, using prominent royal house members;
- The creation of a Paramount Chief Advisory Council in urban areas to provide links between the Zulu king and his subjects working in factories, with the Council advising the king on the welfare of his subjects and ensuring that the workers behave well (basically meaning compliance and subjugation);
- The formation of the group known as *Isicoco Assembly of Indunas and Boss-Boys*, with the main task of de-politicising workers so that they are not influenced by



trade unions and mass liberation organisations, thus countering the liberation struggle (Nzimande, 1991: 173 -177).

Thus, as Nzimande (1991) points out, all these strategies signified just how the state and capital manipulated a combination of Zulu customs, cultural symbols, and authority or political system of *izinduna* to produce highly repressive institutions of control over Zulu workers in the urban factories. According to Sitas, based on the study he conducted in the early 1980s on metalworkers, “The indunas were squeezed to play a more coercive role. They, having the power of language, the power to listen to grievances and translate them accordingly and that controlled most of the promotion networks were squeezed by management to squeeze the workers harder. From an ambiguous position of surveillance and control in the production process, they were turned into the commissioned officers of capital; they had to decide who of the workers were reliable ‘good’ workers to be kept, who should be retrenched, they became managements *impimpis*.” (Sitas, 1983: 273)

Shula Marks’ paper, “Class, Culture and Consciousness: The African Experience 1870-1920” also provides an account of this manipulative practice of traditional African systems and cultural practices to achieve increased control and compliance from black workers by white managements. Subscribing to Earlman’s assertion that “every established order, including the most repressive system of minority rule, tends to naturalize its own arbitrariness”, Marks (2001:22) argues that such order was much more marked both “in the collusion between the South Africa state and the mining industry with African chiefs and *induna* or headman” entrenching a male-centred gender and power hierarchy, including within the mines. As she further states, both the state and the mine magnates realised and appreciated “that rural structures of authority and older notions of communal identity could be ‘battered onto, reinforced’ and manipulated to ‘provide workers with a sense of belonging and self-control that would prevent them from degeneration into a proletariat in need of rights. This, she argues, is best represented in the utterance by one Heaton Nicholas, a Natal sugar-planter and politician, in 1930 that the answer to Bantu communism is Bantu Communalism.’(Marks, 2001: 23)



In his critique of such cultural abuses, Mdluli drew particular attention to the ubuntu/botho culture's virtue of *ukuhlonipha* / *respect* which, as he rightly states, has a major influence on relationships between people at different levels in the society. This, he argues, it does by placing an emphasis on respect amongst people, including those that are unknown to each other as well as by stipulating the authority of the elderly over the young. Mdluli thus sees this value in ubuntu as sanctioning and justifying superiority based on age, sex and social position with a good example being that of the male's authority over females. To support his point of concern that *Ukuhlonipha* value within ubuntu culture is prone to manipulation by those in authority positions, he cites Inkatha's ubuntu/botho syllabus during the apartheid era which discouraged any form of questioning and non-compliance to authority situations such as domination based on sex/gender, age and the laws (Mdluli, 1987: 67-69). This, he argues, can be seen from some of the books that were used within the syllabus. Note the following quote from one of those books, in which male domination over females is justified:

"This respect within the (Zulu) nation is found even among adults. In the family the man is the head. The woman knows that she is not equal to her husband. She addresses the husband as 'father', and by so doing the children also get a good example of how to behave. A woman refrains from exchanging words with a man, and if she does, this reflects bad upbringing on her part (Mdluli, 1987:67).

From another book for the same syllabus, he quotes a statement that illustrates justification of authoritarianism which reads as follows:

"In order that things go smoothly in all kinds of work situations, there are always people appointed to manage such undertakings. In schools, government offices, police, hospitals and everywhere there are people given authority to run and control these institutions, if you are at work, no matter what job you do, even in the mines, don't forget that you must respect all those above you at all times. Even if your ideas clash, that must not make you forget that person of still above you by virtue of his/her position." (Mdluli, 1987: 68; and Mdluli, 1990:17 - 18)

Following an extensive review of the books meant for this ubuntu-botho syllabus, Mdluli (1990: 19) arrives at a confident conclusion that the authors of those books sought to propagate the IFP ideology in primary schools, targeting especially young

people. This was seen as critical and effective way to mobilisation and indoctrination of young people as informed by the Zulu proverb that good lasting impressions are effective on the younger ones. The proverb goes like this: *Zibanjwa Zisemaphuphu* (Mdluli, 1990: 15).

This manipulation of ubuntu culture and the Zulu identity for furtherance the IFP ideological ends could, according to Mdluli, be seen from the following:

- The motives behind the launch of the syllabus i.e. it was introduced at the time when the student struggles were intensifying and becoming widespread against the apartheid and homeland education system. In particular, it was meant to weaken the radical student movement led by the Congress of South African Students (COSAS)
- Efforts to create a space for the unhindered development of the IFP Youth Brigade in all parts of what is today known as the KwaZulu-Natal province.
- The actual content of the lessons whereby each book ends with exercises that require pupils to answer questions such as “explain broadly the IFP manifesto and philosophy”; “how is the national chairperson of the IFP elected?”;
- The requirement that pupils collect news clippings on the IFP and its activities, the pictures of Dr Buthelezi (the leader of the IFP) and the Zulu monarch. Progressive political liberation organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC) and their leaders e.g. Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela or even leadership of the progressive Labour Movement such as Elijah Barayi were omitted from the lessons’ exercises (Mdluli, 1990: 16).

That the authorities tend to manipulate culture to justify and legitimize their authority and domination is supported by the research findings of Liz Gunner and Mafika Gwala in their analysis of the Zulu praise poems called “*Izibongo*” in Zulu in their book “*Musho! Zulu Popular Praises.*” Praise poems or *Izibongo*, it should be understood, differ from Western-type poetry/poems, and are a common cultural practice amongst the people in Southern Africa. While in Zulu they are called *izibomgo*, in Tswana and Southern Sotho they are called *maboko* and *lithoko* respectively (see Gunner and Gwala, 1991:1) respectively. In Pedi they are known as

*direto*. Gunner and Gwala made an interesting discovery in their investigation leading to their argument that while izibongo have a broad social base, they have often been, together with the Zulu ethnicity, ideologically manipulated by politicians to advance narrow, sectional political interests and ambitions. Gunner and Gwala discovered that one of the key functions of izibongo is to identify and praise a person, embody his/her personality by naming and linking him/her with his/her community, lineage and origins. It is this aspect of izibongo which exposed them to their manipulation by those in leadership positions to legitimize themselves through the elevation of praises of the Zulu royal line (Gunner and Gwala, 1991: 7).

Gunner and Gwala argue however that izibongo's proneness to manipulation and the tendency to associate them with royal authorities obscures their rear nature of being broad-based. They argue that their broader social base nature could be seen from the fact that they have always been performed by non-specialists, although often the highly skilled praise poets are used at a range of social activities. Such activities include wedding ceremonies, football matches (where players and teams are given football praises – i.e. *izibongo zebhola*), and during weekend relaxation in cramped hostels and compounds resided by male migrants (Gunner and Gwala, 1991: 8). While this proves that izibongo, as part of the broader African culture, are not a preserve of the elites, they have however always been open to manipulation and appropriation.

As Sitas (1990) has indicated, the manipulative tendencies by Inkatha in the 1970s of using izibongo to narrowly define the Zulu ethnic identity by reducing them to the royal house praises were challenged by progressive black trade union poets who reclaimed izibongo back into the broader Zulu culture. This is a view shared by the editors of the Culture of Working Life Project journal, *INJULA*. They argue that in the 1980s, as the anti-apartheid struggle was intensified, cultural groups consisting of poets, musicians, writers and stage actors spread throughout the country became actively involved in the mass democratic movement, singing and talking about black oppression and depicting a picture of an apartheid-free, democratic South Africa (*INJULA*, 1988: 5). The music and songs were used by the labour movement and cultural activists not only to inspire the collective struggle against the apartheid system and abuses of culture by structures such as the IFP, but also as coping and

survival mechanisms under exploitative and oppressive apartheid capitalist conditions (INJULA, 1988: 5-6).

The testimony to this is the study conducted by Debby Bonnín (1999) on black African migrant workers at the British Tyre and Rubber (BTR) Sarmcol plant located outside a small town of Howick in the KwaZulu-Natal. Bonnín (1999) found that in this plant, the indigenous African Zulu traditions and cultural values played a pivotal role in the organisation of workers into trade unions as a collective force to struggle against the apartheid capitalist oppression and exploitation. Instrumental to this were Zulu praise poets or *imbongi* and shopstewards, who Bonnín calls *grassroots intellectuals*. She argues that they (i.e. grassroots intellectuals) played “a fundamental role in the process of consciousness formation” using praise poems or izibingo (Bonnín, 1999: 40).

Bonnín argues:

“Grassroots intellectuals use the traditions of the community to provide meaning in contemporary situations. Tradition(s) is/are modified and shaped by grassroots intellectuals to respond to present needs. They are utilized by grassroots intellectuals to provide meaning to current experiences...

...The traditional grassroots intellectuals have a moral authority that is defined outside of the modern organizations of the trade union, however as union members and in many instances shopstewards themselves have utilized this authority in the interests of the union and in furthering the aims of the strike. In the early days of union organization, people like Zondi (*a grassroots intellectual who is both imbongi and shopsteward and whom Bonnín interviewed during her study*) were key in encouraging other workers to join the union. During the strike his orations provided encouragement, built morale and created meaning by building links between past and present...

Given the low levels of literacy amongst the workers (67 percent of workers are functionally illiterate with 23 percent having no formal education), oral ways of transmitting knowledge assumes the utmost importance. The imbongi becomes central in the recording of events, in understanding how these events, in understanding how these affect the community, and in being a central store of advice.” (Bonnín, 1999: 40, 53 and 55)

This reclaiming of indigenous African culture and traditional practices by the grassroots activists and organisations gave rise to conflicting usages of izibongo to achieve different goals. On the one hand by the Inkatha (i.e. IFP) and Zulu political elites to justify and legitimize the apartheid homeland system and its bantu education which served to perpetuate oppression racial discrimination and all forms of oppressions and dominations, and on the other by the progressive trade union movement led by the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), which later became known as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), for the struggle against racial oppression and discrimination, against the ethnic-based homeland and bantustan system, and to inspire the struggle against the apartheid capitalist exploitation. Arguing that izibongo were turned into a key art form within the South African political discourse, Sitas points out that they also found themselves at the centre of the contested terrain, especially in what is today known as KwaZulu-Natal (Quoted in Gunner and Gwala, 1991: 12).

Mdluli's other criticism of the use of ubuntu is that some black African intellectuals who advocate the philosophy of ubuntu tend to treat it as a trans-historical concept. The danger with this, he argues, is that the meaning of ubuntu gets treated as if it is stagnant and thus fails to contextualize its usage and interpretation within particular historical junctures. It should be noted with care, as I have mentioned earlier on, that Mdluli's critique does not imply that he dismisses its potentially vital role in the socio-economic life of the South Africans and Africans broadly. Rather, what he is doing is to point out to the dangers that are associated with the usage of this concept as learned from past experiences. Concerns with treating ubuntu as a trans-historical concept is also raised by Lodge (2002) as can be seen from his argument below:

"The invocation of tradition (here referring to the ubuntu concept in South Africa today) ignores the extent to which Africa has changed." (Lodge, 2002: 235)

Another rather sceptical response to the view that the ubuntu culture and its values have a significant role to play in the South African economy, and in particular in the business sector, came from Kamwangamalu (1999) who expresses some serious reservations about what he sees as premature attempts by business leaders to commercialize the concept of ubuntu. While he believes, seemingly implicitly, that

the ubuntu culture and its value system has a great potential to contribute to the socio-economic reconstruction and development of the South Africa society, he finds the current approach used to integrate ubuntu values into the business and employment relations management principles unviable. This approach, which focuses on the use of published literature, training courses and manuals on ubuntu, seminars, workshops, and conferences to extol ubuntu, “risks remaining a pie in the sky....” (Kamwangamalu, 1999:35) Such an approach is advocated by, for instance Teffo (1999), who believes the most viable way to integrate the ubuntu virtues and principles into business management is through mentors employed or hired by companies to teach or preach ubuntu. His argument that ubuntu is first and foremost a social and not a business concept also poses a challenge to Teffo’s claims that ubuntu “is a theory of business co-operation” (Teffo, 1999: 164).

Kamwangamalu argues that rather than being a business concept, ubuntu is first and foremost a social concept. Based on this understanding, he doubts that attempts to integrate ubuntu values and virtues into business management principles in the post-apartheid South Africa would yield any positive, desired outcomes, as the same virtues have been eroded under the apartheid system which has erected walls between communities. His view therefore is that in order for such attempts to become successful, South Africans should first prioritise a creation of an awareness and revival of the apartheid-eroded ubuntu culture and its virtues at the grass roots level. Hence that “doing the opposite ... is tantamount to building a house without first laying a foundation.” (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 31-32)

The need for such awareness and revival was also raised by Memela, when acting editor of *Sowetan Sunday World* newspaper in his regular column *Mamelang*. Memela, one of the advocates for the revival of African indigenous practices and value systems, entitled the article *Revive the ubuntu ethic or perish* (*Sowetan Sunday World*, 14 December 2003), in which he lashes at the Africans whom he calls “monied former township blacks” who have, in the last ten years, left the apartheid-created black townships. This category of Africans and many others, he argues, are displaying selfish individualism, little support and no appreciation of the political or philosophical ethic of communalism or “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” (which translates as: *I am because you are, you are because we are*), obsession with material



success, and lack of interest in establishing structures that promote and preserve the African spirit, heritage and culture.

By the latter, he is referring to what he sees as an absence of the examples of communal living or co-operative black communities in which Africans have come together not only to “lift as they rise”, but also to implement the philosophical meaning of ubuntu to build strong socio-cultural and economic blocks for self-help and empowerment. In fact, he claims that even at family or household level, it is very easy to identify members who have moved away from townships to enjoy material success while their blood relatives and extended kinship are left behind in the state of poverty, starvation and hopelessness. All this is for him a clear indication of the tragic waning away of the spirit of ubuntu which has, in the past united black people at the spiritual level, at the time when they should be consolidating their gains. The notion that prevails, he argues, is “I am going to become a capitalist to pursue wealth for myself and my family” (Memela, 2003:19).

An outcry for the need to revive the vanishing African indigenous values such as those of ubuntu is in fact widespread. To support his argument for revival of ubuntu cultural values, Kamwangamalu cited a letter published in the Drum Magazine of 1995 which read:

“Looking back over the years, some of us can remember how important it was to have the companionship of neighbours. Calling each other Makhi or buur, we helped each other in all areas of life. Alas, those happy days of borrowing and lending anything from letswai (salt) to money without fear of getting cheated, are gone... If we let ubuntu live, our souls, minds, hearts, and bodies will benefit. Let there be that neighbourly spirit of love, warmth, friendliness, kindness, joy and security. And of course neighbourhood Watch must be every person’s job.” (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 38)

Expressing similar concerns about the perceived waning away of the indigenous African cultural values are some of the proponents of the African Renaissance project as unveiled by Thabo Mbeki (current state president of SA), whose main concern is that this waning away would undermine the project. At the conference of the African Renaissance in 1999, Mkhabela expressed a similar concern. Concerned about what she perceived and observed as the questioning of the relevance of indigenous African



culture by young Africans today, she appealed to all Africans to find ways in which they could curb the disturbing trend of the gradual fading away of African moral standards, customs and values. She also urged young Africans who were present at the conference to make use of the wisdom that is carried by their elders in order to learn some of the valuable indigenous values and principles.

Studies such as that conducted by van den Berghe in the early 1960s in the community of the small town of “Caneville” in KwaZulu-Natal, shed some light on earlier signs of what Kamwangamalu and Memela project as the fading away and the weakening of the ubuntu culture, as part of the wider indigenous African culture in SA due to historical pressures of the imposed white or western dominant system. In this study, van den Berghe (1961) found that while some Africans in Caneville continued to practise traditional customs such as bride wealth or *lobola*, to speak their language *isiZulu*, and to observe ‘stiff’ formality during proceedings at community meetings e.g. wearing coats and ties (which he sees as challenging the European stereotypes that Africans merely ‘ape’ whites); there was a sizeable number of Africans who detached themselves from their traditional culture. These Africans, he argued, owing to the dominance of Western culture over Africa culture, and despite their lack of education, spoke a little of English and adopted Christianity as their religion as well as displaying a sense of *cultural shame* towards their own culture, as they perceived Westernisation as a process of cultural improvement from the stage of backwardness to the one of civilization (van den Berghe, 1961: 44-49).

During his 1988 address, I alluded to earlier in this chapter, Nzimande advanced similar argument calling for the introduction of “progressive social services” for the post-apartheid South Africa. This, he argued could only be possible once progressive social service workers start to engage in a critical dialogue with African traditional discourses on health and when people freely and unashamedly express their beliefs and practices. His concern though was that some categories amongst the African people in SA like the youth and sections of the middle class, tend to display what I would argue is closest to van den Berghe’s ‘cultural shame’. Note here Nzimande’s statement in his call for critical dialogue:

“The main reason why this should not be a one way process also arises out of, particularly, the contradictory attitude of the youth and sections of the African middle classes towards traditional practices. The urban youth for instance is finding many of the African cultural formations problematic and display a certain measure of ambiguity towards them and yet have not themselves resolved these into alternative formations....The educated middle classes for instance would ‘publicly’ denounce much of traditional healing, and yet many of them when faced with personal crises would secretly go for help to both *izangoma* or *izinyanga* (these are Zulu names for indigenous African traditional healers/doctors/health specialists/practitioners), and faith healers. So there is a dynamic of repression taking place here.” (Nzimande, 1988: 102)

If the claims outlined above about the indigenous African cultural values fading are correct and valid, then they should be seen as suggesting a regressive trend from ideological progress achieved from the mid-1980s by the black African middle class. In his analysis of the politics and the nature of the African Corporate Petty Bourgeoisie (ACPB), and in particular the African Personnel Practitioners (APPs), Nzimande (1991) found that the APPs’ politics and ideological orientation have always been ambivalent. This, as he points out, was due to their contradictory class location in the context of racially-based national oppression and exploitation. This ambivalence in ideological standing however changed in the mid-1980s, a period in which the national liberation struggle intensified and the black independent trade union movement representative of the black working class grew in strength. This, Nzimande (1991) argues, saw the APPs represented by the Black Management Forum (BMF), beginning to re-articulate their vision in line with and as part of the broader national agenda of liberation marking and the exploited black workers. This, he argues, marked a shift from the earlier positions of political “non-alignment” by the ACPB.

Quoting from public pronouncements by the BMF, Nzimande shows evidence of the APPs’ articulation of their vision and role as being to forge links with the oppressed black masses as their constituency with similar experiences of racial discrimination and oppression as them, as well to contribute to their (i.e. fellow black people)’s advancement and development. That this is so can be seen from Nzimande’s findings which show that the great majority of APPs have working class origins and that even those with petty bourgeois backgrounds, came mainly from the lower ranks of the

latter social class. Hence their historical material circumstances played a crucial role in their political and social consciousness which saw them relating to the struggles and sufferings of the working class. This, he argues, was heightened by the fact that most Africans rarely sever ties with their families as they move up the social ladder, and also that most of them have been to working class schools (Nzimande, 1991: 268-269, and 271-271).

Nzimande (1991) noted that the BMF decision to align with the wider oppressed black masses through participation in the liberation struggle and initiatives for black empowerment was imposed upon the APPs by the intensified national liberation struggle in the mid-1980s. Hence, this decision does not negate the contradictions that have historically defined the APPs and the broader ACPB in SA. Such contradictions, he argues, could be seen from the situation of the ACPB characterised by simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. That is the APPs being drawn and integrated into the structures of capitalist control over the black working class and yet simultaneously being themselves subjugated to control by their white counterparts (Nzimande, 1991: 282-283). While this contributed to the APPs decision to align with the mass liberation struggle and the oppressed black masses in the 1980s, it also according to Nzimande (1991) sharpened their contradictions and ideological dilemmas as defined by their class location.

Nzimande's findings on the role, the nature and class origins of the APPs, which were made about a decade and half ago (at the turn of the 1990s), are consistent with the recent ones by Modisha in his research on black African corporate managers, as he calls them. Modisha (2006) found that most of his respondents (a sample of 21 black African corporate managers) in the study he conducted on the position and role of African corporate managers, came from lower middle class backgrounds. Their parents occupied professional, skilled or semi-skilled jobs such as church ministers, school teachers, and office clerks. He also found that, although some of them had left the black townships and villages to live in the former white suburbs, they maintained ties with their extended families. They also provided support in the form of providing information on how to uplift themselves and financial support to siblings and other extended family members (with an average of five dependants each). Modisha (2006) also found that others indicated that due to pressures of work, they do not have

sufficient time to themselves to get actively involved in communities activities but expressed a wish to do so. Only few of the respondents indicated no interest in going back to their former communities as they felt that their values are different to those of the members of their former communities.

He found that African corporate managers cannot be treated as a homogenous group and thus drew distinctions between different categories. These categorises are “*the converted*” (i.e. those who believe in their organisations and work hard to get promotions); “*the colonised*” (i.e. those who identify promotional opportunities by joining the ‘big brass ring’ or informal social networks of senior white management); “*play-it-cool*” (those who are critical of the lack or slow level of transformation in their workplaces but fail to make their criticisms public); and “*the rebels*” (i.e. those who openly challenge the status quo and tend to be few and in higher management positions) (Modisha, 2006:14-15). Clearly, Modisha’s findings point to the problem of persistent white domination in most SA workplaces, especially in the private sector as most of his respondents are employed by privately run business enterprises (15 out of 21 respondents to be precise). They also point to what appears to be the fear amongst some African corporate managers in the middle and junior management levels of being marginalised by their white senior counterparts (only 3 of the 21 respondents are in executive senior positions). This is in line with the contradictory class locations that were first identified by Nzimande and suggests that the black African corporate managers continue to be in the same situation.

While Modisha’s findings reveal a positive impact on the African corporate managers by the progressive policies and legislation introduced of the post-apartheid government with the aim of redressing the racial inequalities inherited from the past, they also reveal some significant challenges and obstacles to the achievement of genuine equity. Modisha found that African corporate managers expressed complaints about what is referred to as the phenomenon of *upward floating colour bar*, characterised by the splitting of management positions leading to the downgrading of those held by black African managers. Underlying this, he argues, are the stereotypes on the part of the white counterparts about black managers who they project as being inadequately trained and incapable of competently performing their work as do their white managers. This led Modisha to conclude that:

“The majority of interviewees said that their participation in production meetings is less significant than that of their white counterparts. The reasons provided for this included the fact that their ideas are unduly criticised, black people are concentrated in the lower positions and that there were sometimes misunderstandings between black and white people. Since white people were the ones who were mostly chairing the meetings, it became difficult for the majority of black people to make meaningful participation in these meetings.” (Modisha, 2006: 13)

Modisha’s findings thus present evidence that both supports and challenges the claims about indigenous African values of ubuntu/botho vanishing and the black Africans as being ashamed of their indigenous cultural practices and values. The testimony to this also lies in his categorisation of the black African corporate managers, suggesting the dangers of presenting this class and perhaps even all black African people as homogenous. Noteworthy though is that Modisha’s findings suggest that majority of the African corporate managers he interviewed continued to identify strongly with their communities of origin as well as their indigenous cultural values, beliefs and practices.

Notwithstanding this, and the lack of clarity on just how valid and serious the claims made about the indigenous African values system of ubuntu gradually vanishing are and most black Africans shying-away from their cultural practices, it would be unwise not to take them seriously. This is particularly so in the light of the conflicting accounts from various analysts and empirical research evidence that both challenges and supports the claims. It is even more so in the light of the theoretical argument in chapter one which asserts that one of the key preconditions to culture’s continued influence over human behaviour and actions is that people, as cultural agents, should not only identify with the culture’s virtues and values but also actually live those virtues and values in their daily interactions (see Lockwood, 1996; Parsons in Swingewood, 1998; Phillip, 2001; Smith, 2001). Hence, a dynamic, mutually influential relationship between culture and agents is necessary for cultural values to have a meaningful influence.

#### 4.4. Concluding Remarks

Compelling evidence has therefore emerged which supports and strengthens the claims that the indigenous African culture of ubuntu/botho could be tapped into a transformative developmental force for contemporary post-apartheid South African society, especially at the economic and/or business level through integration into the workplace with a view to stabilising working or production relations and enhancing work and business performance. This evidence has been established through the review in this chapter of the literature on empirical research conducted in South Africa both in the past and the present. For instance, Ngubane(1963 and 1979)'s account brings to light the significant instrumental role that the ubuntu/botho cultural values and principles have played in shaping and guiding the direction that the anti-colonial, anti-apartheid liberation struggle in South Africa. It was noted that, in spite of differences in strategy and approach to the liberation struggle, ubuntu/botho's enhanced unity amongst Africans around a common vision and objective – the *Ideal of Nationhood and/or The Collective Will* which was first agreed upon at the 1912 Conference.

I argue that beyond the claims by ubuntu/botho culture's main advocates such as Mbigi and Maree (1995), Lessem and Nussbaum(1996) and Teffo(1996) that its values and principles have a significant role to play in South Africa's socio-economic development, especially in areas such as human resources and business management and management of diversity in the context of global competition. Strong evidence has emerged from the review in this chapter that supports and strengthens these claims. This evidence also supports Ngubane's account on ubuntu's historical role in the liberation struggle. As I mentioned, such evidence arises from empirical studies conducted amongst the black workers in workplaces both in South African and Namibia. They include the findings by Gordon (1977) regarding mine workers in Namibia and also by Moodie (1994). Both report on black migrant miners' cultural practices which they describe as 'brotherhood' culture/s. In addition, Sitas (1996)'s study of black migrant metalworkers found what he terms "defensive combinations" and/or "cultural formations".



These studies were undertaken in the context of the shift within South African sociology during the 1970s marked by growing recognition of black workers as not just factors of production or commodities but also as social force with cultural significance (Webster, 1991; Sitas, 1997). This shift helped to transcend the previously dominant accounts which attributed black workers' activities and solidarities solely to the prevailing economic and political conditions of racial exploitation and oppression at the time, and led to a much more comprehensive balanced account that took into account an equally significant influence by cultural values and practices arising from the broader society.

While the resultant new accounts revealed that not only were economic and political forces at work but also cultural forces, thus bringing about comprehensiveness and balance, I would however like to expand further on them by arguing that although in none of those accounts, no any specific mention was made of the ubuntu/botho culture, strong evidence could be found within the studies' findings which point to the influences of the ubuntu/botho cultural values and principles on the workplace and hostel/compound culture. Evidence also shows influence on other related practices and solidarities developed by black workers for survival and resistance to the white capitalist system of exploitation and oppression (INJULA, 1988; and Mdluli, 1990).

The evidence presented shows that these differ from other workers' culture/s found in the workplaces of countries such as Britain, which appear to have been mainly, if not solely, influenced and shaped by immediate workplace factors such as common class experiences of exploitation, low wages, menial work, unsafe working conditions and exposure to imminent dangers (Gordon, 1977:153). In South Africa and other Southern African countries, black workers' cultures of solidarity were influenced by a combination of workplace-related factors and non-workplace based factors. This, I would argue, makes these black workers' cultures and their defining solidarities and practices unique and somewhat different from those found amongst the British workers. Such practices, I suggest have their roots in the indigenous African culture of ubuntu/botho. That can be seen from practices such as black migrant workers' retention of strong ties with rural homesteads through regular visits and the sending of remittances to their families in rural areas and generosity extended to all workers (including strangers) outside the ambit of the group membership. The latter practice

of generosity is anchored in the belief that “You must help your fellow man because the next time it might be you” (Gordon, 1977).

This belief is consistent with the ubuntu/botho cultural values and principles that emphasise human dignity, sharing, compassion, interdependence, communalism and solidarity and also the central maxim “I am because you are and you are because I am” or “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye*” or “*motho ke motho ka batho*”, as expressed in indigenous languages proverbs with embodying similar values and meanings. Examples of proverbs include this one Northern Sotho language which says “*Go fa ke go fega*” which translates as “*giving is like hanging/storing in a safe place where you know that in times of need, you could easily reach out to that place for help.*” This essentially means that “by giving to others, you effectively are investing in those other people as a potential source of future assistance in times of need.” Other examples could be seen found in the Ciluba language such as “*Muntu apa muntu apa ki mbowa*” (literal translation: “A man here a man there means no fear”) but actually meaning that “we can achieve anything if we support one another”, and “*Bubedi bwa disu mbubedi bwa diulu*” (literally translated as: “The sickness of the eye is the sickness of the nose” meaning that “Your neighbour’s problem is your problem” (Kamwangamalu, 1999).

The above practices, shaped not only by the apartheid capitalist conditions of racial exploitation and oppression but also by ubuntu/botho culture’s values and principles that promote collective joint action for survival and resistance, enabled black workers to successfully limit the powers of management-created compound and hostel authorities such as *indunas* and “Blackjacks”. Note for instance the description by Sitas (1996) of those limited powers through the concept “diffusionary forms of control”. In limiting those controls, as could be seen from the Sitas account, they were able to create a space in which they easily brought in new migrants into group life. This helped to protect them (i.e. new migrants) from raids by the “blackjacks” and Administration Boards policemen.

The practices of respect for the elderly migrants within compounds and hostels, who in turn provided the younger and new migrants with leadership, reveals the clear influence by the value of *ukuhlonipha* in Zulu or “*go hlompha/thlompha*” (in Sotho

and Tswana, respectively); while the leadership provided by the elderly migrants and the absorption of younger, new migrants are consistent with the ubuntu/botho based proverbs such as *“etetsa serathana pele, ka moso se tla go etetsa”* and *“A tlala a e phsa madiba, a sutelela madibana”* (both taken from Northern Sotho emphasising the importance of developing intergenerational life and leadership skills).

Both the case for and the claims by ubuntu/botho advocates that this culture has a key role to play in the socio-economic development of the contemporary South African society, are further strengthened in the light of the evidence of the successive historical failure of the Western-modelled humanist managerial strategies such as schemes of workers’ participation adopted by employers and managements in order to forge and secure co-operation from workers around matters of production and performance improvement.

Notwithstanding the established compelling evidence that pointed to ubuntu/botho culture’s influences on black workers’ cultures of solidarity, some serious concerns were however raised. They highlight potential constraints to ubuntu/botho culture’s successful and effective integration into workplace and business spheres to improve working/production relations, enhance development of joint vision and goals as well as improve work/business performance. Based on findings from the review in this chapter, I would argue that for the integration of ubuntu/botho values into workplace strategies and practices to enhance the realisation of the desired outcomes, it is important that the inherited legacies from the past are overcome. Of particular importance here is the deeply entrenched adversarial and racial legacy which led to a situation whereby the ubuntu/botho cultural and other indigenous traditional practices and values were drawn into the workplaces by both white managements/employers and black workers/trade unions to achieve different conflicting goals. While the former manipulated these practices and values to entrench control over workers, to intensify exploitation as well as pacify workers; the latter mobilised the ubuntu values and symbols to enrich as well as to enhance working class solidarity for survival of harsh living and working conditions and for collective resistance to the apartheid capitalist system of exploitation and racial oppression.

While it is imperative to overcome this legacy, it should however be acknowledged that workers' actions were by and large a reaction to the conditions of exploitation and oppression under which they found themselves. This therefore suggests that wherever attempts or plans are being made today to integrate ubuntu or botho cultural values into the workplace or business sphere, measures should be put into place especially by organised labour, to guard against any possible misuses or manipulation by employers or managers in order to ensure that there is good faith and that this does not occur at the expense of workers. Failure to do so would lead to a backward slippage into the past techniques of manipulation, resistance and increased conflicts.

Perhaps the lesson to be learned from these past legacies and experiences is that ubuntu/botho values and other indigenous African practices are not new to the SA workplace and/or business world. Rather their presence in the workplace was used by management and workers for different reasons as pointed out above. Thus, while Kamwangamalu (1999) is correct in arguing that ubuntu/botho is not a business concept but a social concept, he is however incorrect to suggest, by the implication of his assertions, that this culture and its values are foreign and non-existent within the economic, business and workplace sphere. It has been noted from the reviews in his chapter that compounds and workplaces in SA have always been integrated to enhance control over black African migrant workers. Kamwangamalu's argument is even more difficult to sustain when one considers theoretical evidence and argument that humans are not just economic and political beings but also socio-cultural beings, and also that the cultural and the economic, although different and autonomous, are inseparable (Swingewood, 1998; Cock and Bernstein, 1998; Ray and Sayer, 1999).

Linked to the above point and disputable too, highlighting both an opportunity and a potential constraint to the integration of ubuntu/botho cultural values and principles into the economic and workplace sphere, is the bold assertion by Kamwangamalu (1999) that the apartheid system and policies have not only created social walls but also eroded the ubuntu/botho culture. While indeed such an assertion holds true and should thus be considered seriously, especially in the light of evidence that points to displays of *cultural shame* (van den Berghe, 1961; Nzimande, 1988; Memela, 2003); I have however also argued that there is a danger of over-exaggeration in these assertions. This is particularly so as counter evidence points to the resilience and

continued relevance of the indigenous culture of ubuntu/botho in the daily lives of African people. It was noted that the ubuntu culture has survived despite the disruption by colonialism and apartheid of its institutional and structural basis (see Ngubane, 1963 and 1979). Its resilience and importance to Africans is further proven by its continued influence on the lives of black workers in the hostels, compounds and mines (Moodie, 1994; Gordon, 1994; Sitas, 1996; Marks, 2001).

While this suggests an opportunity for the possibility of ubuntu/botho culture's positive influence on contemporary SA's socio-economic development, the point about *cultural shame* could however be pointing out to a potential constraint, especially if such shame is displayed by the majority of Africans in South Africa. a lessons learned from the East Asian experiences and theoretical reviews in chapter one suggest that for societal culture to have any meaningful influence on human behaviour and activities, members of the community from which that culture originate should actively identify with its values and principles and live them in their daily interactions. This is in fact supported by both East Asian experiences whereby business and/or workplace managers and workers identified with and carried with them the values and principles such as those of Confucian culture that guide their lives and interactions within their communities and families into their workplaces.

Another potential constraint could be the language factor in SA workplaces. As was noted, the ubuntu/botho cultural values are embodied in the indigenous African languages which serve as the means through which these values are communicated and exchange. The point, which as I mentioned, is consistent with the analysis by Boccock (1992) which shows that language when broadly defined, constitutes the key social and cultural practice. The challenge for South Africa is that the apartheid system and colonial subjugation not only marginalised the indigenous African languages in the 'official' discourse, but has also created social divisions amongst South Africans of different racial groupings. Kamwangamalu (1999) refers to "social walls", resulting in situation whereby linguistic exchanges were inhibited. While this has disadvantaged all South Africans, it has been particularly severe on white South Africans, the majority of whom can only speak English and/or Afrikaans but cannot speak any of the many other indigenous African languages.

I am thus inclined to agree with Kamwangamalu (1999) that until these 'social walls' are brought down, the idea of ubuntu/botho being tapped into a transformative and developmental force, especially in the business economic and workplace sphere, could remain just a pipe dream. Hence, while the current approaches being proposed by ubuntu/botho culture's advocates such as Mbigi and Maree(1995) and Teffo (1999) that its integration can be achieved through published literature, seminars, conferences and workshops facilitated by consultants are necessary, they are however inadequate as they would only realise ephemeral success.

A further constraint to ubuntu/botho's positive role in socio-economic development initiatives and strategies is the pervasive order of capitalism that thrives on naked exploitation of workers and rests on neo-liberal values and principles that promote cost-cuttings. This is especially achieved through retrenchments of workers and creation of precarious, insecure labour markets through casualisation and contracting out none-core work. The current global, neo-liberal capitalist processes have worsened the situation for workers and entrenched this kind of capitalist order, which as noted previously, is incompatible with the person-centred values and principles of ubuntu/botho culture. This system has led to intensified labour conflicts. One example in SA is that the South African telecommunication giant Telkom. In spite of the huge annual profits made in 2004 estimated at 4.5 billion rands, it still planned to retrench over 4000 workers (see [www.bday.co.za](http://www.bday.co.za) and <http://allafrica.com> last accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> August 2004). This triggered a strike action which lasted for more than a week as the unions organising workers at Telkom fought the planned retrenchments and condemned them in the light of growing unemployment. Note here the following statement by one of the unions' leaders then: "How can a company that made a R4.5 billion profit afford to retrench workers in a country that has a 40% unemployment rate? Surely this is counter-productive to government's plans to halve unemployment and reduce poverty?" (See <http://allafrica.com>, last accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2004). The Telkom case is but one in the huge pool of many other companies or industrial corporations and enterprises engaged in similar practices and using similar approaches to achieve profit maximisation goals. For the ubuntu/botho person-centred values and principles to work best and the benefit of not just the dominant few, it would require a transformation of the current system into a much more humane economic order such as the one often referred to by some as *capitalism with a human face*.



Having advanced the above arguments, based solely on the reviews of literature and debates, which point to both possibilities or opportunities and potential constraints to the integration of ubuntu/botho culture into the workplace, the next chapter will turn the focus onto a case study of one of South Africa's industrial enterprises i.e. a factory. The purpose here is to further subject the findings and arguments made in this chapter to test in order to assess their strength i.e. are the experiences at this selected case study consistent with those recorded in the literature and debates reviewed in this chapter or not? Do they lead to similar kind of findings and, if so, what general conclusions can be drawn?

# **Chapter Five**

## **Workplace Culture, Participation and Work Performance in South Africa: Implications for the role of Ubuntu/Botho Culture - A Case Study of Cranco Metals Ltd<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the factory in this case study is fictitious due to ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality. Because of this, vast amount of empirical evidence and information on the labour process including photographic images were left out to protect the identity of the firm and factory. My decision to this effect came after I had submitted the first draft report to the General Manager who, following the reading of the report, expressed disappointment with me and accused me of misrepresenting his company and tending to side with production workers. Considering his reaction and the initial agreement between myself, on the one hand, and him and his team of senior managers, on the other, that I can only publish my report once they have satisfied themselves that it is truly reflective of reality in the factory; and in the best interest of reflecting the truth as I uncovered it from my field research and maintaining the intellectual integrity of my study, I found it necessary to observe ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality. This is one of the ethical dilemmas that field research presents to researchers as best captured by Neuman (2000) who argues that since field researchers tend to study those without power in society, they get criticised for ignoring the powerful and for being biased towards the less powerful. This, he argues, is due to the fact that “in groups with hierarchies or organisations, most people assume that those at or near the top have the right to define the way things are going to be, that they have a broader view and are in a position to do something”. He goes on to argue that “when field researchers become immersed in the world of the less powerful and understand that point of view, they are expressing a rarely heard perspective”. Hence that “they may be accused of bias because they give a voice to parts of society that are not otherwise heard.” (Neuman, 2000: 377).

### **5.1. Background to Cranco Metals and Workforce Profile.**

Cranco Metals Ltd is a base metal production and processing factory in SA. It is located approximately 60 kilometres from central Johannesburg in Gauteng Province, South Africa. It has been in existence for over four decades. In the history of its existence, it has gone through various phases influenced mainly by the changing conditions in the markets for the base metals and mining products. In response to the competitive market conditions and varying customer needs, the base metal product is now being produced in a wide range differing in terms of the size and quality and/or metal content. This followed the recent technological innovations aimed at enhancing the production process whereby Cranco Metals replaced the old furnace facility used to cast its base metals with a new modern furnace through which various metal products are cast to meet customer needs. The process of installing the new facility started in May 1999 and was completed in July 2000. While this upgrading project is said to have cost the company approximately R20 million, Cranco Metals management is however satisfied that this was money well spent as the new facility not only enables it to produce a wide range of products to satisfy varying customers' needs and enhance better galvanising, but has also helped to overcome some production bottlenecks through improved speed and efficiency.

Cranco Metals is thus a massive, giant metal refinery which employs both modern technology and high labour input to enhance its production processes. It prides itself as a secure and reliable centre of employment in the Gauteng Province. At the time of research, its workforce was just below 1000 workers, including permanent and casual workers. Its production process is continuous, semi-automated, labour intensive and integrated. It is characterised by the use of raw materials, cranes, grabbing equipment, spades, conveyor belts, trucks, processes of blending and mixing the raw materials with water and chemicals, sensors, and human labour power. Thus all the seven major production plants are highly integrated, suggesting that each and every stage of the process requires careful attention and monitoring by workers and first line managers in order to ensure that the final product is of an acceptable quality for the customer and that wastage is minimised or eliminated. Human labour power plays a critical role since the movement of raw materials on the sensor-activated conveyor belts requires

monitoring by workers to assist the belt by removing the accumulated materials from the sides of the belts, thus ensuring that the process is unimpeded and efficient. They also help to identify and report on the conveyor belts and other machine equipment as well as wastage due to leakages that may not only be costly to production but could also pose a danger to workers. These serve to ensure that high quality standards are achieved at all times. Such reported faults are submitted to line management, who then secure the services of technicians to attend to them.

Also during my observation at the shopfloor level, I noticed that the production process is potentially hazardous and dangerous due to the constantly moving machine equipment such as grabs, acidic solutions used for processing and gases emitted, high levels of heat, noise, and dust. The company does however provide workers with protective clothing such as gas masks, ear plugs, hard hats and goggles. Safety signs are posted in all relevant places to alert workers to potential dangers and hazards. I also noticed that the handling of raw materials was quite a tedious and potentially dangerous job. This was confirmed by the workers themselves during the interviews when they expressed concern about the moving grab machines and cranes which they said they always had to be alert to in order to avoid colliding with them and thus avoid injury. They complained about exhaustion as they are required to handle large quantities per day in order meet daily production targets.

Demographically, although Cranco Metals' workforce is diverse in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, its shopfloor production workforce is predominantly African and male with most being between 30 and 49 years of age (of the 60 workers interviewed; only 11 are in their late 20s and 5 are in their 50s). The youngest was 23 years of age and the oldest 56 years old (see Tables 1 and 2 below). These workers have generally long employment service with Cranco Metals. 37 workers have worked for Cranco Metals for between 5 and 15 years, 15 for between 15 and 30 years with only 8 for 3 to 5 years (see Table 3 below). This rather long service with the company is however not matched by high job mobility and high wages. Most of the workers are in the lowest grades i.e. Grade A3 and Grade A2, while the rest are either in grades B1, D1 or B2.

**Table 1 . Age distribution of interviewed production workers**

Age	Number of workers
20 – 24	1
25 – 29	11
30 – 49	42
50 – 59	6

**Table 2. Racial composition of interviewed production workers**

Race	Number of workers
Black	59
White	1
Coloured	0
Indian	0

**Table 3. Employment tenure of interviewed production workers**

Employment Tenure	Number of workers
0 -3 years	0
3-5 years	8
5 – 15 years	37
15 – 30 years	15

The literacy levels should presumably be high as the majority of the workers have both primary and secondary school education (of the 60 workers interviewed, 31 have reached primary schooling level and 29 have reached the secondary schooling level). Only 1 of the 29 workers has completed standard ten (now grade 12) and is pursuing university studies and two have had no formal schooling at all. During interviews the socio-linguistic background of the workers was investigated and this revealed that the

majority of the workers at Cranco Metals are from rural areas of three provinces of the Republic of South Africa i.e. Eastern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. Of these, 23 respondents were from Eastern Cape and their mother language is isiXhosa; 22 were from Limpopo Province and their mother languages are Sepedi/Northern Sotho, Tsonga, and Tshivenda/Venda; and 14 are from KwaZulu-Natal and their mother language is isiZulu. Only 1 respondent said he is from the Mpumalanga Province and speaks isiSwati. This linguistic diversity has however not generated tensions and conflicts amongst the workers. This could be partly attributed to the fact that most of the workers can speak more than one language. Of the 60 respondents, only 13 speak only their mother language (4 of them were relatively young - still in their 20s - and expressed a willingness to learn other languages as they go along). Eleven speak more than one language including their mother tongue and 36 speak more than three languages including their mother tongue. One claimed to be able to speak all 11 South African official languages and is in his late 40s. The majority of black workers however cannot speak either English or Afrikaans well. Out of the sample of black workers interviewed, 29 cannot speak either Afrikaans or English; 20 can speak either or the two languages well i.e. English and Afrikaans, and 10 can only speak a little of both languages.

As they are mainly migrants, they view their stay in urban Gauteng as temporary and all are planning to settle at their respective rural homesteads on retirement. For temporary accommodation, they reside in the nearby townships and informal settlements. Of those interviewed, 49 stay in the nearby townships either renting rooms or staying in *Mikhukhu* or *Zozos* (i.e. shacks made of corrugated irons). The other 11 workers stay at different informal settlements or squatter settlements within the vicinity of the factory while the remaining few stay in hired rooms at the nearby middle class suburban residential area.

Cranco Metals' management is predominantly white and is multi-layered. While the top level is comprised of only white managers, both the top and line management levels, although predominantly white, have, some black presence and this is particularly so with areas of middle management such as Employment Equity, Human Resources and Communications. In the seven production plants in which I conducted interviews and made observations, the management hierarchy is made up of



superintendents, the foremen who are below the superintendents and the supervisors who are below foremen. In some cases however, the same person serves as both superintendent and the foreman. Of the seven production plants, two are headed by black African superintendents-cum-foremen with the rest under white foremen and/or superintendents. The five white foremen have been promoted into their current positions based on their long tenure of service and experience. They have been with the company for between 19 and 26 years. The two black African foremen, on the other hand, are relatively younger but have university degrees which could explain their quick progression to the line management level. According to top management, all line managers, on being promoted, have been provided with part-time training in communication, management and computer literacy in order to enable them to execute their functions efficiently. Supervisors are also predominantly white. During my study, I found only two black supervisors in the seven production plants.

The factory's General Manager acknowledged these racial disparities at the management levels but mentioned that Cranco Metals is in the process of addressing this situation to ensure that the equity requirements are fully met as required by the Mining Charter. He mentions that Cranco Metals has introduced a mentorship programme for junior black managers in order to prepare and equip them with the necessary skills to enable them to subsequently take up senior positions. Arguing that Cranco Metals is committed to the Mining Charter and aims to make great strides towards achieving equity goals in the next five years, he mentioned that already progress has been made as at both senior and line management levels, having already achieved  $\pm 30$  percent black representation, including African and Coloured managers. This, the General Manager argued, is proof enough of Cranco Metals' commitment to equity and he believed that they are well on their way to achieving their target of 40 percent black presence in management positions.

Notwithstanding this claim about progress and commitment to equity, the management's view is not however shared by the NUM, which believes and claims that management is in fact dragging its feet on addressing the equity question. Note, for instance here, the response by NUM's senior representative at Cranco Metals:

“The management’s approach to employment equity shows lack of commitment to employing black managers. This is a white place. Cranco Metals should employ black capable people from both outside and internally. I agree that Cranco Metals is trying to appoint black people into senior positions, but there is a ceiling. All four business units and other senior positions such as marketing management, procurement management, and general management are occupied by whites, and this is where crucial decisions are made. In the appointment of Closed Corporations (CCs) for sub-contracting of work, blacks are not considered.”

To protest at this situation and to register their dissatisfaction, NUM organised an industrial action in March 2003 in which grievances such as Cranco Metals’ failure to comply with equity requirements and other issues were brought to management’s attention. While NUM is a rather militant union at Cranco Metals, there are two other unions organising at this refinery. One is the Mine Workers Union (MWU) Solidarity and has as its members predominantly conservative white artisans (e.g. boiler makers, fitters, and section leaders) and the other one is the United Association of SA (UASA) and it organises mainly white clerical and office workers and technicians. While MWU Solidarity is less militant in its orientation and approach but occasionally works in solidarity with NUM on matters of common interest, UASA is more of a sweet-heart union which hardly ever uses industrial action to address its grievances. Note here this telling response by the Chairperson of MWU Solidarity:

“As MWU, we prefer to sit down with management and discuss our grievances. We are like watch dogs to ensure that things go according to our views and also for the company. We do not want the company to close down and then lose jobs. We also look after our members’ interests. We look at all inputs and check what is good and what is bad for the company and workers. It is not a case of all I want, I want. We have shared interests as we all form part of the company. NUM has different culture.”

Asked whether they ever embark of strike or industrial action, he said:

“Ever since I worked here, for 22 years, we never had a strike because we resolve issues around table. The management is always willing to help.”

## 5.2. Cranco Metals' Organisational Culture: The Performance Enhancement Culture (PEC)

Cranco Metals' management has set as its main goal to ensure that the company becomes a leading global producer of affordable cost base metal and a dominant player in the base metals' markets. This goal it aims to achieve through its sustainable high performance culture which rests on the following key principles and values: *Care; Mutual Respect; Fair Workplace Practices; Accountable Working Behaviour; and Integrity as well as Team Work Spirit, Belief in People, and Excellence*. This Performance Enhancement Culture, the Cranco Metals General Manager stated, was developed to promote the living of these values, to achieve operational excellence and improve systems, as well as to ensure safety and empower workers partly through regular recognition and rewards (interview, 05-12-2003: 15h00). To promote this Performance Enhancement Culture and to get workers and line management to buy into it and identify with it as well as to live it, Cranco Metals' management has embarked on a number of strategies. Amongst such strategies, is the use of the services of outside experts and consultants whose primary role is to assist in getting employees to internalise and live the guiding PEC values and principles as well as with diversity and equity management.

At the time of my study, the consultant at work was a white motivational-type speaker and life strategist, Dr London<sup>2</sup> who in facilitating sessions aimed to sensitise workers and line management about Cranco Metals' PEC. He adopts what constitutes a multi-pronged-type approach with three main components. During my interview with Dr London, he outlined his approach which starts with an assessment of the situation prevailing at the time of his intervention. Particular attention is drawn to relationships and communication between workers and their managers, the financial state of the company, and factors impacting on financial performance such as the currency exchange rates and prices of raw materials. Based on this assessment, he then presents the current prevailing scenario to both workers and managers, highlighting to them

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<sup>2</sup> This is not the real name of the consultant. Once again due ethical consideration of anonymity and confidentiality were observed and the real name was thus omitted for a fictitious one. The contracting of Dr London followed the termination of the contract with one of the acclaimed black African consultants on organisational culture and change, whom I call Dr Afrika for similar ethical considerations of anonymity.

the urgency of the need to actively adopt and practice the Cranco Metals' new PEC in order to alleviate the current situation. For the line managers, his main aim is to make them aware of the vital position which they occupy within the company's leadership and advise them on how to optimally utilize this rare opportunity for the benefit of the company and their subordinates. This intervention, which he terms leadership alignment, aims to advise line managers to conduct themselves in ways that would inspire and motivate workers as well as forge the team spirit necessary to enhance the organisational identity, performance culture and workers' self-esteem to become creative and innovative.

The leadership alignment session is then followed by what he terms a cross sectional alignment session which focuses on improvement of communication between workers and line managers. His main role here is to guide both parties to communicate in new ways that strikes a balance between the negative and positive energies, with energies being channelled mostly in the right directions consistent with the company's cultural values and the creation of a common corporate identity or corporate citizenship. This is all done in team alignment workshop sessions held away from the factory with separate groups of workers, senior managers and middle and line managers.

Also adopted as a strategy by Cranco Metals to promote its PEC amongst its staff is the use of industrial theatres which are seen by senior management as an appropriate measure to consolidate and reinforce what has been learned in off-factory team building workshop sessions. The industrial theatres are seen as vital and essential for sensitising workers and line management to live the company's PEC values and move away from the old mindset. As the Human Resources Manager states, the use of industrial theatres is an old tradition within the parent company and has recently been adopted by Cranco Metals in line with the parent company. In an endeavour to be on a par with the parent company, Cranco Metals has created the Wall of Fame with pictures of workers on the wall in the Main Hall, a factory-based venue in which all industrial theatrical performance are held (established during an interview with the Human Resources Manager, 21/11/2003).

During my observations, I noticed that Cranco Metals uses every possible medium within its reach to popularise and promote its guiding PEC culture and value system. This includes the Main Hall where industrial theatrical performances and other meetings such as health and safety meetings are usually held. In this Main Hall, the parent company's corporate group values are written in bold letters on the high wall in an effort to get everyone to buy into and live the PEC value system. Other forms of media used by Cranco Metals include notice boards, outside walls of building used as venues for meetings on which regular updates on productivity and performance levels are highlighted, weekly and bi-monthly internal newsletters and/or publications, and computer screen savers. At the main gate entrance of the plant, one is greeted by a huge board mounted on steel pillars on which the above-mentioned Cranco Metals' values are outlined. Cranco Metals has created computer screen savers as another means through which its core values are communicated and promoted.

The internal weekly and bi-monthly newsletters and publications developed and used by Cranco Metals to promote its PEC are the *Weekly UpDate* and *Cranco News*. The latter is a quarterly publication, and both are used to inform and update the Cranco Metals community about the latest developments and issues affecting them. The regular features in the *Weekly UpDate* are the following:

- On the first page of each and every edition is a highlight, in bold, of the main value or principle of the (this could be any of the values or principles that constitute the Cranco Metals' PEC);
- Reports on safety issues i.e. the number of injuries or accidents that occurred, progress made towards reduction of injuries and accidents at work, and measures needed to avert work-related accidents and injuries i.e. reiteration of what precautionary measures need to be observed and future targets set to reduce and avert accidents and injuries;
- Report on performance and productivity levels, future targets, and new issues pertaining to production;
- Motivational Phrases derived or quoted from various texts;
- A recognition list whereby all employees, but more often line and senior managers, submit names of individuals and teams of workers who are deemed

to have done something remarkable towards realising the Cranco Metals' values and objectives.

The *Cranco News* is used as complementary to the *Weekly UpDate* with its main focus being on broader issues and developments of relevance to Cranco Metals. These include reports on community development projects in which Cranco Metals is involved and achievements thereof; regular reports by the General Manager on the state of Cranco Metals in terms of performance levels (e.g. achievements and recognition awards given to Cranco Metals for its good performance, current and future challenges facing Cranco Metals and what could be done to overcome those challenges and make Cranco Metals a profitable and viable operation); a feature related to this is Cranco Metals' Vision Statement, clearly meant to regularly remind all Cranco Metals' employees of the significance of upholding the PEC and living its values; events such as social outings meant to reinforce team alignment; and messages of encouragement for the workers and the entire Cranco Metals community.

Beyond the promotion and publicising of the Cranco Metals' corporate cultural values, the top management developed practical and complementary measures to ensure that the goals associated with the PEC are actually realised. One such measure, developed in line with the parent company's broader business strategy, is the Occupational Health and Safety Programme. This Programme at Cranco Metals is comprised of safety trainings for all staff members; the factory-wide Safety Committee which meets regularly to discuss and address safety questions and has representation from all the production plants; the Occupational Health and Safety Department with staff that specialises in safety questions and ensures, through monitoring and evaluation, that safety is observed at all times; and short daily morning meetings held in each plant to discuss work-related issues arising from the previous day, work allocations, discuss safety issues and remind all to observe safety measures. All the workers and line managers interviewed mentioned that they have all undergone safety training and have attended these short meetings. Safety training provided to Cranco Metals staff, which I too underwent prior to entering the plants, is meant to alert and inform the workers about top hazards in their working environment or respective plants and what measures need to be taken to avert injuries and accidents. Morning meetings are meant to remind workers of the significance of



applying what was learned from the training and of always taking precautionary measures to avert injuries at work as well as to get to workers to focus on work.

To assess the effectiveness of safety training and morning meetings in terms of actually reducing or eliminating work related injuries and accidents, regular meetings of the safety committee are held and reports are submitted on safety questions in the *Weekly UpDate*. During the time of my research at Cranco Metals, I had a chance to attend one of safety committee meetings as an observer and which was attended by the Production Manager, the Communication Manager, the Safety Co-ordinator from Cranco Metals' Occupational Health and Safety Department, and all the safety representatives from the various plants. The meeting was held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2003 at 11h00 in the Main Hall. During the meeting, two crucial Occupational Health and Safety-related items were discussed i.e. report by Communication Manager on the HIV/AIDS Prevalence Test to be conducted the following week and the safety progress reports from various plants or departments as well as plans to avert injuries at work and ensure high quality levels of health and environmental safety achieved.

On the HIV/AIDS prevalence test, the Communication Manager mentioned that the prevalence tests will be conducted in the following week. He explained to safety representatives that the decision to conduct the test was taken at the parent company level whereby both Cranco Metals and another subsidiary were selected as pilot sites to evaluate the prevalence levels and work out a treatment programme that would include provision of anti-retroviral drugs and other medication for sexually transmitted illnesses. To conduct this, a private professional health service company was hired to work together with all stakeholders and the company medical team to provide peer education and then conduct the tests by collecting saliva samples from amongst the Cranco Metals staff. He explained that this is done with the best interest of all the Cranco Metals and the parent company's community members and that workers should not feel compelled to participate in the saliva exercise as it is voluntary and the results will not point to any individuals but would remain anonymous (i.e. names are not needed and samples will only be categorised in terms of age groups and groups letters A-D). Although voluntary, he however urged everyone to participate. The idea behind this is to prevent the spread of HIV infections and treat those who are infected.

On the second item, the Production Manager, addressing the attendees as colleagues, made comments on the minutes of the last meeting. He raised concerns about the low attendance levels of the safety committee meetings by safety representatives and urged everyone to make sure that they attend future meetings, and if not that they should submit an apology. He also expressed dissatisfaction with the failure by safety representatives to regularly keep records on safety and work-related injury incidents, as evidence pointed to high level of similar incidents, and reminded them of the importance and value to both workers and the company management. He urged them to fulfil their responsibilities with diligence by leading workers by example. In urging them to strive to live the corporate values, he said:

“Make sure that when coming to meetings that you bring reports and suggestions and plans on how to prevent such incidents in future, and not come empty-handed. I give responsibility to the chairperson to ensure that SHEQ meetings are well attended and that progress is achieved and I pledge my support to him. I am not going to fight you, I am going to ask you what the problems are and if you need any help from my office, let me know so that I can help. Remember we can all learn from each other if we work together as a team and ensure the same problems do not continue to recur.” (Production Manager, 12/11/2003).

The Production Manager’s words were reiterated by the Occupational Health and Safety co-coordinator when she emphasised the importance of keeping records on what is being done and how that could best be improved to achieve high quality performance. She mentioned that the auditors from her department need the information not to penalise workers but to work out ways of improving the situation, and that this is done in the spirit of seeking to achieve continuous improvement and living the Cranco Metals’ values of excellence. Interestingly however, and as the discussion continued, safety representatives responded to the Production Manager’s concern about low attendances at Safety Committee meetings by stating that the main reason for the low turnout at meetings lies with lack of co-operation from the foremen. They reported that more often than not, some foremen do not inform them in time about the planned meetings and in some cases do not inform them at all. The Production Manager’s response was that the best solution to low attendance would be to draw up a list of meetings scheduled for the entire year and ensure that all the safety representatives have copies.

They also raised concern about lack of responsiveness from amongst the foremen to their requests and needs. For instance, one safety representative reported that they have since requested a fridge for their tea room but nothing has been done to address that. Another one raised concerns about the clocking card system used to clock in and out of the plants, and that they feared that it might be used to punish them by docking and deducting their wages for being away from work without permission. Another safety representative reported that workers in his section raised concerns about experiencing high levels of fatigue due to instructions from foreman to work hard and that the foreman would not allow them time to rest and regain strength.

Another strategy recently developed to go beyond just promotion of Cranco Metals PEC values and to enhance the living of these values and achievement of business objectives, is the Business Enhancement Programme known as the *Sebenza* Project (a Zulu name for Work). According to the *Weekly UpDate* reports, the BEP or *Sebenza* Project was first proposed at the company board meeting in 2003 and was developed as a response to the extremely competitive base metal industry environment and market conditions, which are said to have been exacerbated by both the strengthening of the South African rand against the US dollar and the high prices of base metal raw materials, resulting in Cranco Metals' profit margins being heavily squeezed. The *Sebenza* Project has two phases through which it is being implemented: first, through the evaluation of the business to identify aspects that lead to high costs and work out ideas and ways of reducing costs; and second, to implement those ideas with the objective of not only reducing costs but also enhancing revenues. According, to the General Manager, in some of his letters in the *Weekly UpDate*, although the project was planned to be implemented in full scale from January 2004, initial moves towards its implementation had already begun. This is so with the posting of suggestion boxes throughout the factory to solicit ideas on how to improve business through which more than 200 ideas had already been gathered. The General Manager was thus highly impressed that the staff was already beginning to buy into the BEP or *Sebenza* Project and was optimistic that, although the project implementation in January may be a painful and challenging process, through everyone's co-operation, it would become a success i.e. achieve financial successes.

Although the PEC initiative was welcomed by everyone at Cranco Metals, management's enthusiasm about it and the BEP is however not fully shared by the majority union, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) which represents mainly black production workers. This lack of enthusiasm stems from dissatisfaction with the approach that the management had adopted to promote the PEC and the nature of the BEP or *Sebenza* Project as a business enhancement strategy. When asked about the PEC, the NUM's representative and full-time shop-steward at Cranco Metals, stated that, although as NUM they were not opposed to the PEC in principle, they were however unhappy with the approach used by the management to promote it amongst workers. This seemed to stem from miscommunication between management and NUM over the issue of the hiring of consultants. According to the General Manager, both Dr Afrika and Dr London, were hired in different capacities to assist Cranco Metals with diversity/equity management and PEC-related performance management respectively. For NUM, however, the appointment of Dr London shortly after Dr Afrika was seen as a racially unfair substitution of the latter by the former. NUM also expressed concern about lack of transparency. This dissatisfaction on the part of NUM led to a dispute that manifested itself in the form of an after working hours protest against non-compliance with the Employment Equity Act, working hours and racism. NUM's views on PEC are represented in the response below:

"Our participation, as NUM, in the PEC is problematic. We need to be consulted before any consultants can be hired to deal directly with our members. We need to first investigate his/her credentials before we can approve his/her appointment. I am not trying to be racial here but the issue of lack of resources raised by management is not really an issue to us. When the Dr Afrika was first invited, we were not happy but after scrutinising his credentials, we felt comfortable and approved his appointment. All of a sudden, management has changed and they introduced Dr London. It seems to us that they feel that they can't give money to a black person. To this day, we are not convinced why that black consultant had to be replaced. There is an element of racism here because the opportunity is now given to a white person. The current team building exercises programme by the white consultant is similar to that of the black one, but we are told he is too expensive. We told them we would not encourage our members to participate in the programme; it is up to them to get workers to do so. Management has a right to speak to workers but we also have a right to speak to them about our position. They (i.e. management) has chosen to proceed to implement the PEC without our support. So far the team building sessions are voluntary as there is no agreement. I can tell you now that these sessions are not working. The PEC is not reaching the workers. We see that

during our mass meetings. Some of these workers who attend told us that it is an opportunity for them to be officially away from work. They are honest with me that it was an opportunity to be away from the plant and not lose their wages. Workers do not trust management; they have their faith in the union. This followed a string of promises of bonuses that management made to our members if they improved production but have failed to fulfil those promises.”

Similarly, there is a disagreement over the approach used in the BEP or *Sebenza* Project. NUM disputes the BEP’s approach of seeking to cut costs and enhance profits through cuts in the size of the workforce i.e. retrenchments. Note this response by NUM’s representative:

“We are not opposed to the need to work towards cutting production costs and achieving the 60 million rands target. We feel we should deal with suggestions on how best we could reduce costs. Perhaps the first focus should go to casual workers. So far, there is no agreement on BEP but the management has chosen to proceed without us. We felt that we should not be left out and serve as spectators but get involved so that we could get first hand information to prepare ourselves for the CCMA processes. We defend our members as NUM because the management is being greedy. When the rand is weaker, they claim not to make any profits. You see, when it first announced the BEP, management thought workers do not understand it. They then decided to run the competition for the name for the project in order to popularise it. After getting the name *Sebenza* from one of the workers, they thought workers now know about the project. In fact, the guy who came with the name told me that he was tempted to participate because he wanted to win the prize i.e. the Company Hamper. Workers are negative about the BEP. They know that BEP is about cost cutting and is not meant to benefit them. The management knows the budget and how they spend it. We are not told how money is being spent. We just see things being purchased and delivered and do not know how a decision was reached to purchase or spend money on them.”

These responses, which represent the NUM’s viewpoint, highlight several problems and issues raised with the PEC and BEP initiated by the senior management. Although both management and NUM believe that it is essential to address the challenges of low performance facing Cranco Metals, they differ however in how those challenges should be addressed. This is clearly evident from NUM’s dissatisfaction with what it sees as lack of fairness and transparency on the part of management, unwillingness to negotiate the strategies and approaches used to address those challenges, management’s racism and greediness, and lack of co-operation and support of the PEC and BEP by workers as they see them as being aimed to benefit

management at their expense. As will be noticed from the evidence gathered below through interviews with both management and workers as well as workers' representatives, these concerns and dissatisfaction are further confirmed.

### **5.3. Workers' Attitudes, Perceptions and Reaction to PEC and the Impact on Performance**

So far, the discussion has been focused on Cranco Metals' workforce and management profile and its organisational workplace culture i.e. PEC and the related performance enhancement measures in the form of the safety culture. This, in a way, was more at the management office level initiatives, and now the focus will be moved towards the level of implementation i.e. the shopfloor level which has been labelled by some theorists as the "hidden abode of production", the most important area where actual productive work activity is taking place and where all the planned interventions such as the PEC are intended to take effect. Thus, in this section, the focus will be on examining and evaluating the extent to which the promoted Cranco Metals' values are entrenched and incorporated into the day-to-day life on the shopfloor. It is necessary to examine how the Cranco Metals' management has communicated the PEC, Occupational Health and Safety Programme and *Sebenza* Project to both workers and line management, to establish whether or not workers and line managers are familiar with these interventions, and whether or not they have embraced and are living them or are guided by them in their daily conduct and activities at work. It is also necessary to establish what their perceptions, attitudes and reactions are to the PEC values, the Occupational Health and Safety approach and *Sebenza* Project, and how this is influencing production or working relationships and work performance.

In other words, this section aims to examine, on the basis of the findings from interviews with both workers and line managers, the impact that the PEC and its values have on the shopfloor and work performance. In so doing, both the enhancing and hindering factors will be examined. The main purpose here is to establish whether or not the Cranco Metals case study, as an illustrative example of the typical South African workplace, presents a strong case for the need to experiment with the ubuntu/botho cultural values in the workplace in order to enhance workplace

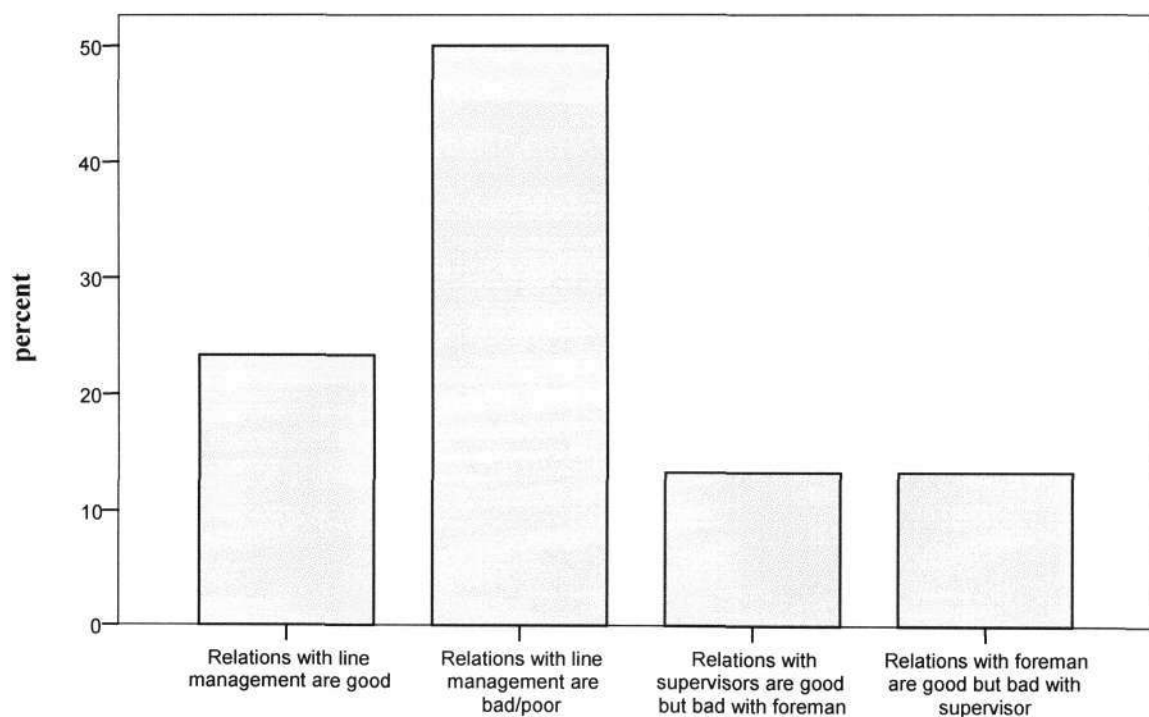


relations, democracy and work performance. Blunt generalisation on the basis of one case study must, of course, be guarded against. Thus the implications for the role and relevance of the ubuntu/botho culture and values will be examined, as well as the opportunities and constraints thereof. If a case is established for the need to introduce and experiment with the ubuntu/botho culture and values, that would necessitate an examination of the approach that would be appropriate for integrating ubuntu values in the workplace in order to enhance the desired impact. In doing so, attention will also be drawn to the links, if any, between the PEC at Cranco Metals and ubuntu/botho culture.

One area investigated through interviews with workers and line managers was that of the nature of production and working relationships on the shopfloor. Both workers and line managers (i.e. the supervisors and foremen) were asked to describe the relationships at work. This is necessary for examining whether or not the PEC values have any meaningful influence on working relations to enhance the achievement of the desired relationships with positive influence over work performance. Interviews with shopfloor workers in different plants of the factory revealed relationships with line managers that are rather strained and riddled with tensions due to poor line management skills, racial perceptions and attitudes as well as poor communication. Of the 60 workers interviewed, 14 (i.e. 23% of respondents) described the relationships with the line managers (i.e. both the supervisors and foremen) as good and 30 (i.e. 50% of respondents) described them as bad. Out of the remaining 16 (26% of respondents); 8 (13% of worker respondents) reported that while their relationship with the supervisor could be described as good, the same could however not be said of the relationship with the foreman. Similarly, the other 8 (13% of respondents) said their relationship with the foreman could be described as good but with the supervisor as bad (See Table 4 and Figure 1 below) .

**Table 4****Workers' Perception of Relations with Line Management**

Workers' Perception	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Relations with line management are good	14	21.9	23.3
Relations with line management are bad/poor	30	46.9	50.0
Relations with supervisors are good but bad with foreman	8	12.5	13.3
Relations with foreman are good but bad with supervisor	8	12.5	13.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Figure 1.****Workers' Perception of Relations with Line Management**

The 14 workers who reported good relationships with their line managers would not however elaborate further on reasons for their responses, but on the whole felt that the improved relationships with the line managers is attributed mainly to the new political environment of democracy and labour legislations and policies. Note here responses by some of these workers:

“Relationships with foreman and supervisor are fine and satisfactory.”

“There are no problems at all with our foreman, supervisor and superintendent. They do not shout at us. They ask when making suggestions and there is good communication.”

“There are no problems with the foreman and the superintendent. The new laws are great. Before a white person was a white person. The new laws help to guide relationship here at work. We respect each other.”

The 30 workers who described relationships with their line managers as not being good cited racial tensions as straining the relationships on the shopfloor due to what they perceived to be racially biased treatment by white foremen and poor communication. Note here some of their responses:

“We work well with the foreman but he does not talk to workers properly. He favours his colour. Yesterday, a white boiler maker deliberately grabbed some dirt and threw it all over the floor and on the footpath but when he was reported to the foreman, the foreman did not take any action. Instead, he blamed us as workers. He simply wrote a report in which he said the problem was solved but in fact it was not and until now it is still not resolved. It means he favours whites over blacks. There are so many grievances that we present to him but he does nothing about them.”

“Whites are harsh when they speak to blacks. For instance, they would shout loudly saying that I cannot do my work properly.”

The response below highlights not only racial practices as part of the legacy of the apartheid, but also the authoritarian style of management used by the foreman which further strain the working relationships and impacts negatively on workers' morale and performance at work. In fact this worker felt that they perform well when the foreman is absent but as soon as he is back to work, the working morale depletes.

“The foreman does not treat us well. When working, instead of appreciating and praising us, he would say to us *kom kom kom*. If he tells you something, he does not expect you to respond or ask questions. He says that if he is not around, we do not do our job and that is the reason he always follows us when we are busy working. It is not true that we are lazy. When he goes on leave for 30 days, work goes faster than when he is around. If he is around, we do not work as we are always scared. You (referring to himself and other workers) might get injured. *O sa swere mokgwa wa dipolseng wa apartheid – maburu a dipolaseba be ba thwaetse go sala*

*batho morago go re ba kgone go ba gatelela* (this is a response in Sepedi language – one of South Africa’s indigenous ethnic language. In English, it could be translated as: *He (i.e. the foreman) still behaves like in the past under the apartheid – white farmers used to always be behind people just to oppress them).*”

The same worker respondent went on to say that the foreman is too controlling and seldom shows appreciation to workers for good performance. He finds this discouraging. As he put it:

“The foreman is too controlling. As workers, we need appreciation for our efforts so that we can work even harder with commitment to improve our performance. I should feel free at work. In fact, we can even offload between 28 and 30 coaches which is beyond the normal daily target of 24 coaches.”

When asked if there is any cooperation between the workers and line managers, another worker said, echoing the above views:

“No, there is no cooperation. We have a foreman and a superintendent who, when approaching, the workers escape and disappear because they fear that he may use wrong language. For example, tea time is between 10h00 and 10h30, but if the foreman finds that you are still in the tea room after 10h30, instead of coming to you and find out what the problem is, he would shout and that hurts. This shows poor management skills. It is not about race, race is no longer a major issue, the key thing is to co-operate. Whites support each other. The old order is still in place and it always makes you tired – it is difficult to ignore it. They (i.e. white line managers) force blacks to do work. It is only when they are happy or in good mood that they show some positive signs because you are doing something for them.”

That foremen are arbitrary, authoritarian and racially biased in their treatment of black workers on the shopfloor also emerged during an interview with the representative of the National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) at Cranco Metals. When asked to describe relationships between workers and line managers, he said:

“They are very bad in the sense that line managers do not understand the role of the union in the company. NUM members are treated harshly. If they make simple mistakes, they get charged. They (i.e. foremen) would say to them (i.e. to workers), go and tell NUM. Go and tell Mandela and the ANC.”

He also referred to a recent grievance in which a worker complained about the white foreman's attitude.

"There is a grievance today in which one of our members was told to listen and follow everything his supervisor is telling him because he is white. They had differences over switching a fan because it circulated gas fumes. When the guy reported the incident to the foreman, the foreman told him to always listen to his supervisor because he is his boss. We always make our members aware of their rights so that they can ensure their safety at work. Other grievances include complaints about superintendents and foremen shouting at our members when it is unnecessary. They tend to shout at them in front of other workers"

Workers are also unhappy with the methods of control employed by the management. These include the use of the electronic clocking system for monitoring workers' movements in and around the factory during working hours. The clocking system uses an electronic swipe card for recording workers' arrival and departure from work. They are required to clock in on arrival and clock out on leaving. If it happens that a worker leaves work during working hours, he would be questioned and warned that, should he repeat that, he would have his wages docked. The system is installed at the main entrance gate and other entry points such as to the change rooms. While, according to the General Manager, the system was installed with the view to protecting workers from intruders into their change rooms, the workers see it as being used to monitor and control their movements. They argue, for instance, that once they are at work, they are not allowed to visit the change room as that is considered loafing, and would lead to penalties such wages being docked and cut. Note the responses below one of the shopstewards:

"The clocking system is used to control workers to ensure they are not going up and down while at work. It is able to tell whether you were at work or not and workers are not happy with it. It is used in the change rooms and in toilets. The longest time a worker can take in the change room is 10 minutes. If you stay longer, the foreman calls you and asks you why you have been away from work for so long. He would warn you and say in future further steps will be taken against you."

This point was reiterated by a worker respondent when he said:

“Well, the clocking system and the card is fine. What I do not like is when they require that we use it in change rooms. We do not understand this. Sometimes the card opens, sometimes it does not, and workers get late to work and get shouted at and reprimanded by the supervisors and foremen for arriving late. Sometimes one misses the transport to work and arrive late at work and have wages cut. We do not like the clocking system. We are treated like prisoners and this happens all the time.”

One foreman, in response to the question that investigated views on both the levels of production and relationships with workers on the shopfloor, had this to say, also revealing the arbitrary nature of the clocking system and workers’ negative reaction to it:

“I am not happy with the current production levels and relations. I have one of the most difficult crews at Cranco Metals to work with, and these results in too many grievances and complaints. There are a few outstanding cases as I am talking to you right now. We have a new clocking system which I tried to explain to the workers about and the fact that it is meant to ensure that each and everyone works for the full 40 hours a week. The company is entitled to 8 full hours a day. Not all of them are happy with the new system. The thing is, once you clock out early at the change house before the knock off time, your time for the day stops. I hope that this will resolve itself with time as they get used to the system.”

Further control over workers is achieved through someone who has been specifically employed in the Human Resources section to monitor the sick leave situation and levels of absenteeism arising from workers’ frequent applications for sick leave. This apparently came in the light of management’s concern that workers might be abusing the sick leave system thus creating costs for the company. The aim was to combat the situation. Further investigation revealed that the high levels of absenteeism amongst workers is due to the fact that most of the workers at Cranco Metals, which is based near Johannesburg, come from far away. As I mentioned earlier, most of the workers’ permanent homes are in the countryside in provinces such as the Eastern Cape (+/- 1000 kilometres away from Johannesburg); Limpopo Province (+/- 300 kilometres from Johannesburg); and KwaZulu-Natal Province (+/- 500 kilometres from Johannesburg) and rely mainly on the inefficient public transport system for their travelling. This was revealed in some of the responses. Note here the response by one of the two black foremen:



“One of the problems that I encounter here is that of too many sick leaves and high levels of absenteeism. Most of the people stay far away e.g. in Eastern Cape and when going home, they would book for absence and return to work couple of days late. When they do this they bring with them sick notes and this is costly to the company. This shows lack of honesty as they were not really ill.”

Also contributing to high levels of absenteeism and the large number of sick leaves are the dangerous and unhealthy working conditions. Production processes at Cranco Metals involve the use of heavy metal equipment, highly toxic acid solutions, moving equipment, hot molten metal, high noise and dust levels as well as hot conditions. All these posed risk to the health and safety of workers. Notwithstanding all of these, and despite senior management’s prioritisation of measures taken to ensure that workers are healthy and safe, line managers’ authoritarian style and approach only serve to undermine those efforts. This, for workers, raises serious health and safety concerns as they fall victim and thus find the taking of sick leaves as one of the ways in which to relieve pressure on themselves. Note here the remarks of one of the worker respondents employed in one of the plants with the most acid solutions and fumes:

“The supervisor always want to dominate. While we have our normal work targets, he would set his own target above the normal one. This results in workers taking regular sick leaves and every two months we have to see a doctor for treatment. We sweat heavily here at work such that our pants get wet. Some workers even faint at work due to dehydration. I drink a lots of water even at night. You see, I have now lost weight. I used to weigh 94kgs in 1996 but from 1999 onwards, I experienced a weight loss. I now weigh only 65kgs. In this plant, there are high noise levels and lots of acid. The ventilation is poor. Some of us are no longer reproductive. We tend to take sick leaves to get some rest from work and then submit a medical certificate to avoid our wages being deducted. As a black person, it seems as if I am the spade for a white foreman. He said all he is concerned about is reaching his target and when I tried to complain, he said I talk too much.”

Another worker respondent said:

“We work in dangerous conditions but when you fall ill and take leave, there is someone around who has been appointed to handle only absences from work. When you come back to work, just on your arrival, he is there waiting and questions you.”

Clearly, high absenteeism and frequent sick leaves are a symptom of dissatisfaction on the part of workers with the treatment they receive from line management whom they find to not only be racist but also authoritarian. The person who has been appointed to monitor the situation of sick leaves has even earned himself a negative reputation amongst the workers such that they named him *scorpion*.<sup>3</sup> Thus, rather than management seeking to find out the underlying causes of the high levels of absenteeism and frequent sick leaves, it has chosen a path that simply deepens adversarialism and erodes workers' unwillingness to co-operate with management on production matters as well as their commitment to working hard. This has widened the gap between management and workers, thus undermining the very culture that Cranco Metals is seeking to promote through the PEC.

Other worker responses revealed inconsistencies between senior management and line management's approaches to worker management, and thus the failure of the latter to manage in line with the company policy and values. Note here their responses:

"The foreman gives us his instructions but not as required by the company e.g. the company requires that two workers be posted there at each production point, but he instead only places one worker. That makes the job really difficult and tiring. The job itself suffers because the pressure is only on one person."

"The company has policies that guide relationships between workers and foremen, but the foremen have their own personal instructions which make us uncomfortable and unhappy as workers."

Other workers felt that relationships with line managers are constrained by the latter's lack of prompt response to their reports of faults on the production line, which they feel exposes them to health risks and work-related injuries. This is testified by the following responses:

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<sup>3</sup> Scorpion is in fact a crime busting unit in South Africa which has been established in post-1994 period as part of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA). It was established as a multidisciplinary agency for investigation and prosecution of organized crime and corruption, in order to ensure a safe and secure environment which is conducive to both growth and development. Owing to its high prosecution levels, often broadcast on national television, it has earned reputation of fearfulness but also respect, living up to its image of the real scorpion known for its toxic sting.

“We do not work well with them (i.e. supervisors and foremen). If we report faults to them such as leakages, they would just ignore and instead tell us that they would call someone to come and fix it but that never happens. For example, there is now a problem with the forklift but nothing has been done about it as yet.”

“If you report a fault such as broken equipment or machine to the foreman, he would just note it down but the following day things are still the same. Nothing is done to repair the machine or the equipment. This is not right and we do not feel well about this as it poses danger to our safety. If you get injured, they say you injured yourself, yet they failed to repair the machine.”

Owing to the perceived bad treatment by line managers, workers developed other survival techniques, in addition to the abuse of the sick leave system, as a form of covert resistance to what they perceive as harsh, unfair and racially-biased treatment by line managers. Note here this worker’s response:

“Foremen behave as if they own the job. We developed tactics to defend ourselves. When he approaches, we pretend to work hard. Thus, in the end we end up not working properly - just like soccer players performing poorly not because they can’t perform but simply because they do not like the coach.”

This suggests that the unfair, racial treatment by white foremen has, contrary to the spirit of commitment that the *Sebenza* Project is trying to promote, driven the workers into situation in which they become less committed to cooperation with management to improve production and performance. This was also revealed by the response of one of the few black supervisors who raised complaints about workers’ lack of commitment at work. In his response, he said:

“We have production targets but we do not always reach those targets due to sometimes cranes being broken, the conveyor belts being faulty, and the concentrates being too wet. Our other major problem lies with workers who tend to chat during working hours and thus creating delays in production. They would pretend to be working hard whenever they see me approaching but as soon as I leave, they relax. Some workers are no proud about coming to work because when they report to work, they bring along outside issues which they start chatting about at work. The *Sebenza* idea of commitment, hard work and efficiency is not observed. For example, work normally starts at 7h30 but if I have not yet arrived and they are

here at work before me, instead of starting with work, they would wait for me to arrive first. That does not show commitment to *Sebenza* spirit.”

The above responses by the majority of the workers interviewed, which point out to pervasive authoritarian and racist style of shopfloor management, suggest that the progressive labour policies and legislation and the broader democratic dispensation in SA achieved in the past ten years, have had a limited impact on what are rather informal practices and attitudes at the shopfloor level. This clearly signifies the impact of the past apartheid legacy on the present. These findings, which point to continual elements informal white *baaskap* and *apartheid workplace regime*, confirm and reinforce Bezuidenhout’s (2005) argument, based on his research findings in the engineering sector, that within the workplaces of this sector there is “continuity in change” as elements of the apartheid workplace regime are being reconfigured in new ways. Also noticeable from the above response is that this “continuity in change” characterised by racial and authoritarian practices, is the collective resistance this has sparked on the part of black workers who, like other workers before them, drew strength from the ubuntu’s values of solidarity, compassion and interdependence. In Chapter 4, this was demonstrated through notions such as Sitas’ (1996) “diffusionary forms of control” displayed by black metal workers residing in hostels and Gordon’s (1994) “brotherhood culture” amongst the black migrant workers working in gold mines and residing in single-sex compounds.

As I have however also indicated earlier on, the breakdown in responses revealed that the remaining 16 workers interviewed were divided in half with one half (i.e. 8) reporting better relationships with foremen than with the supervisors and the other half reporting that relations with the supervisor were better than with the foreman. Some of their responses were

“We do not cooperate well, especially with the supervisor. He does not show us respect or speak to us respectfully. When he speaks to us, it’s as if he is speaking to children. The foreman is fine. Well sometimes when he gives instructions, he may sound like he is shouting at us but he is okay. The supervisor usually pretends when the foreman is around but once he is gone, he changes.”

“We are used to the foreman; if you do not know him you may think he is bad. There is however a *boeremag*<sup>4</sup> supervisor here. We clash with him but he does not have power. We ignore him. He has a bit of an apartheid problem.”

“The supervisor treats us well. The foreman does not. If there is something in shortage, he would not address it e.g. cathode blades are faulty but he takes three months to attend to them. Anodes get hot when not repaired. When you report a fault to him, he would say something irrelevant such as saying it is your problem and fix it.”

“I have not much complaint about the foreman. But the supervisor always wants to dominate. The job we are doing has a target set for each day. The supervisor sets abnormally high targets and the result is exhaustion and sicknesses.”

The above findings suggest that the overwhelming majority of workers are unhappy with their current relationship with line managers. As was noted, they attribute these poor relationships to a wide range of factors. These include racial bias by the line managers in their treatment of workers, authoritarian and unilateral practices in decision making on work-related matters by line managers inconsistent with the top management's PEC-based approach which promotes co-operative relations for joint decision making on production issues, and poor response to workers' needs like reports of faults on the production line that not only hamper performance but also expose workers to dangers making the workplace unsafe for the workers. This also undermines the objectives set out in the Occupational Health and Safety programme of doing everything possible to ensure high levels of safety at work by eliminating work-related injuries.

This, together with evidence that arose from the Occupational Health and Safety meeting that I attended, points to a lack of co-operation between safety representatives and line managers. The latter tend not to inform the former of the upcoming meetings, which in turn undermines safety initiatives led by senior management. Poor communication and poor line management also contribute significantly to persistent occurrences of minor injuries called Less Serious Injuries (LSIs). While the *Weekly UpDate* newsletters show Cranco Metals' impressive success in achieving targets in terms of reducing and eliminating hours and days lost

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<sup>4</sup> A *boeremag* is a term used to refer, usually, to rightwing white Afrikaners who are considered to be racist and have hatred for black people in South Africa.

to injuries, they however also show that LSIs continue to occur. This is evidenced by the weekly newsletters of between October 2003 and February 2004 which show that a total of 22 LSIs occurred over this period. In my reading of these Newsletters, there was not a week without LSI.

Further interviews revealed that production relations between workers and management are also strained by poor communication owing to language constraints and a non-participatory, arbitrary and authoritarian style of management. The latter is clearly evident from most of the responses already outlined above, but as will be noticed, it is also evident in further responses as outlined below. The non-participatory style of management was revealed in the following responses by one of NUM's shop-stewards:

"There is a problem with information from the top management. There is a problem here at Cranco Metals of poor communication which affects workers' performance. Top management hardly ever comes to the plants. They just meet with heads of departments and if there is any serious issue, they invite shop-stewards to the meeting with them. Top management only knows shop-stewards and not production workers. This gap creates a problem because it gives line managers greater autonomy. It would help if the top managers come and sometimes express appreciation to workers for maintaining satisfactory production levels. I do not trust that shopfloor managers correctly represent senior management."

This view is contested by the General Manager who argues that contrary to workers' claims, top management pays weekly visits to the plants. The fact that both management and workers hold different viewpoints confirms the existence of a serious problem of lack of communication.

Although, as was seen from the workers' profile discussed earlier on, most of the black workers can speak more than one language, language ironically turns out to be a major constraint to communication at the shopfloor, thus further exacerbating the adversarial relationships. Evidence gathered suggests that white line managers have a major language deficiency, as they cannot speak any of the African indigenous languages. Interestingly, this evidence arose not from interviews with black workers but from the responses of some of the white line managers. A white foreman



admittedly said in response to a question on what his views are on productivity and performance levels:

“Performance is not satisfactory. This is not only due to engineering-related problems but also a problem of communication. We (i.e. white line managers) do not understand the culture and problems of our colleagues (referring to black workers). English is incomprehensible to black workers. This results in soft issues that could be easily resolved turning into hard issues. You say something and they would interpret it in a different way. It creates lots of misunderstanding which cause tensions and divisions. Because of all these, the next thing the union is on your doorstep. We have excellent people and even section leaders but Cranco Metals is not using their full potential (that’s my own personal opinion). People on the lower level (i.e. supervisors and other foremen) do not recognise that potential.”

His further response revealed that the approach used by senior management also impedes communication, resulting in a general failure to the living of the HPC values on the shopfloor:

“We try to use the company’s corporate values when we talk to each other in the plant. These values are vital and make people feel at ease and cared for. It is however one thing to tell people about the values, but it is another to train them to understand, accept and even live the values. If Cranco Metals is serious about implementing these values, it needs to make sure that they are accepted and internalised by everyone. But you can’t implement everything at once. We don’t live the company values. The problem does not lie with people but with communication. Lack of training for line managers on these values and communication skills and how to deal with people is essential.”

The gravity of language and communication problems was also uncovered in another interview with a white shift supervisor, who unlike his colleague, tended to blame workers for failing to use communication devices provided by the company. In his response about his functions, he said:

“When giving instructions, I do so with hand signals to show workers what to do and how to do it. I have been here at Cranco Metals for many years; I have now learned how to communicate through hand signs with workers which really helps. Someone who cannot speak English, Afrikaans or *fanakalo*, would normally use hands to communicate.”

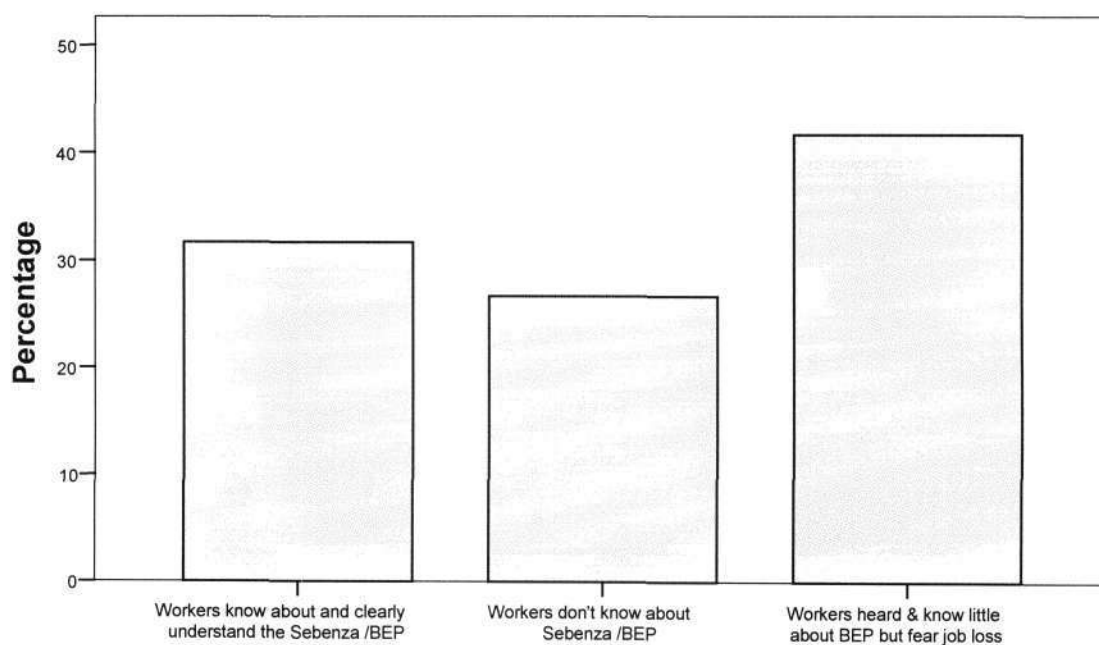
When asked how he thinks the problem of communication could be resolved, he said:

“We have always had a problem here. People (referring to workers) want to be independent and do not want to take instructions. But when there is a problem, they (clearly referring to black sections leaders as they are provided with radios for communication) do not want to speak over the radio to explain what the problem is. I end up having to travel about 900 metres to go and find out what the problem is, but only to find out that the problem needs a fitter. It is time consuming. This communication problem will never change here. Most of the people do not want to speak on the radio. I do not know why people do not speak on the radio. Maybe they are afraid of something. We can use our regular morning meetings not only to discuss about safety but also as a training tool on communication.”

This problem of poor communication between management and workers also became evident in workers’ responses to the question that sought to explore their familiarity with and knowledge of strategic initiatives undertaken by management to improve performance such as the BEP or *Sebenza* Project, as well as their attitudes and perceptions thereof. While some workers seemed clear about the Project and its objectives, the majority however revealed either total ignorance or inadequate understanding of the Project and its objectives. Those falling within the latter category felt that the Project is aimed to benefit the company at their expense, and thus feel alienated and targeted for retrenchments. This is so despite the fact that management ran a competition in which workers were required to find a suitable name for the project, which culminated in the Zulu name of the Project. Of the 60 workers interviewed, 19 (i.e. 32% of respondents) showed a good knowledge and clear understanding of the BEP or *Sebenza* Project, 16 (27% of respondents) showed no knowledge nor understanding thereof, and 25 (42% of respondents) have a vague idea and understanding of the Project, and are concerned that it would result in retrenchments (see Table 5 and Figure 2 below).

**Table 5.****Workers' Knowledge of the Sebenza /BEP Project**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Workers know about and clearly understand the Sebenza /BEP	19	29.7	31.7
Workers don't know about Sebenza /BEP	16	25.0	26.7
Workers heard & know little about BEP but fear job loss	25	39.1	41.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>93.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Figure 2.****Workers' Knowledge of the Sebenza /BEP Project**

Those with knowledge and a clear of understanding of the BEP or *Sebenza* Project made the following responses when asked about it:

“I heard about it in August this year (i.e. 2003). There was both verbal and written communication about it to workers. They said that Cranco Metals should operate in new ways like employ the use of computers. They came to us to seek our opinions and input on how we could improve Cranco Metals’ productivity. The BEP people came here and we shared ideas.

They said they would take our ideas on how productivity could be improved to top management.”

“I heard about it. Management sent out BEP people throughout the plant to tell us about it. They said that Cranco Metals is not doing well financially due to the Rand/Dollar Exchange. They said we as workers should bring forth ideas and suggestions on how to improve production and performance to enable Cranco Metals to reach R60 million target before February 2004.”

Those who said that they know nothing about the BEP or *Sebenza* Project made the following responses:

“I know nothing about it. They never came to us to explain about it. We hear about it in the plant.”

“I do not know about it. I just know about a certain school in the township called *sebenza*.”

“I just know about in the township when they distribute pamphlets saying *abantu ba sebenze* (i.e. *people should work hard*) but I never heard of it here at work.”

Lack of clear understanding and knowledge of the *Sebenza* or BEP Project amongst most of the workers is revealed in the following responses which signal inadequate communication:

“*Sebenza* means work. We heard about it from the superintendent. It came because of the need to retrench. If a worker is working, they monitor him. To us, it means “*indoda ifanele seenze, uma inga sebenze, I ya hamba*” (This is a switch to IsiZulu which translates as: “*Each and every man should work. Failure to do so, would lead to retrenchment or dismissal*”). They (i.e. management) do not say so to us, but that is how we as workers interpret it.”

“We hear about it, I just heard about it recently. Their *Sebenza* Project is only meant to exploit us more by making us work harder and harder to increase production, yet we are paid little.”

“They say BEP/*Sebenza* is about the Rand/Dollar exchange. Management does not appreciate it when you are prepared to work hard. We produce well day and night, but they come to us with complaints that the base metals’ price has dropped. We produce good quality, but they complain about low sales.”

“We were told about it at the meeting, but we do not know how it works. *Umlungu* (the Zulu for white person) told us about it and how Cranco is performing in terms of the Rand/Dollar Exchange rate and then he urged us to work hard. As workers, we told them we can’t because the company employs casuals or contract workers. According to us, production is fine”

“We just hear about it in the plant. I am not sure it is very important. It seems like it is. I just hear about it but I am not sure where it originates from. *Re kwa bare ‘Hey! Madoda, indoda ne indoda isebenze’*” – this is a code switch to Sotho and Zulu which translates as: *‘We hear that ‘Hey guys! each and every man should work.’*”

Strangely, these workers’ responses stand in contrast with the argument by top management that prior to the introduction of the *Sebenza* Project, there was an extensive process of consultation with workers. According to the General Manager, all the trade unions organising at Cranco Metals were consulted for two weeks and that there were road shows whereby each and every employee was invited and given an opportunity in his/her own language to discuss and ask questions. He further maintained that a memo written in three languages outlining reasons for the implementation of the project was distributed to all. Other avenues that were used to communicate on and discuss this matter, he said, include the use of *Weekly UpDate* newsletters, morning meetings, and a storyboard that was discussed with +/-80 percent of the workforce. Clearly, the responses seem, to some extent, to confirm the General Manager’s view but also suggest that the consultation process was not adequate, however noble its intentions were.

The responses on relationships on the shop-floor are consistent with the responses by workers to the question that sought to explore the extent to which Cranco Metals’ values are lived and practised on the shop-floor and the effect thereof on production relations and work performance. Workers were asked whether Cranco Metals cares about its workers or not. Of the 60 workers interviewed, only 16 (i.e. 27% of respondents) felt that Cranco Metals cares about their welfare and 24 (40% of respondents) felt that it does not care. The remaining 20 (33% of respondents) agreed with some reservations that Cranco Metals cares about the workers’ welfare (see Table 6 and Figure 3 Below).

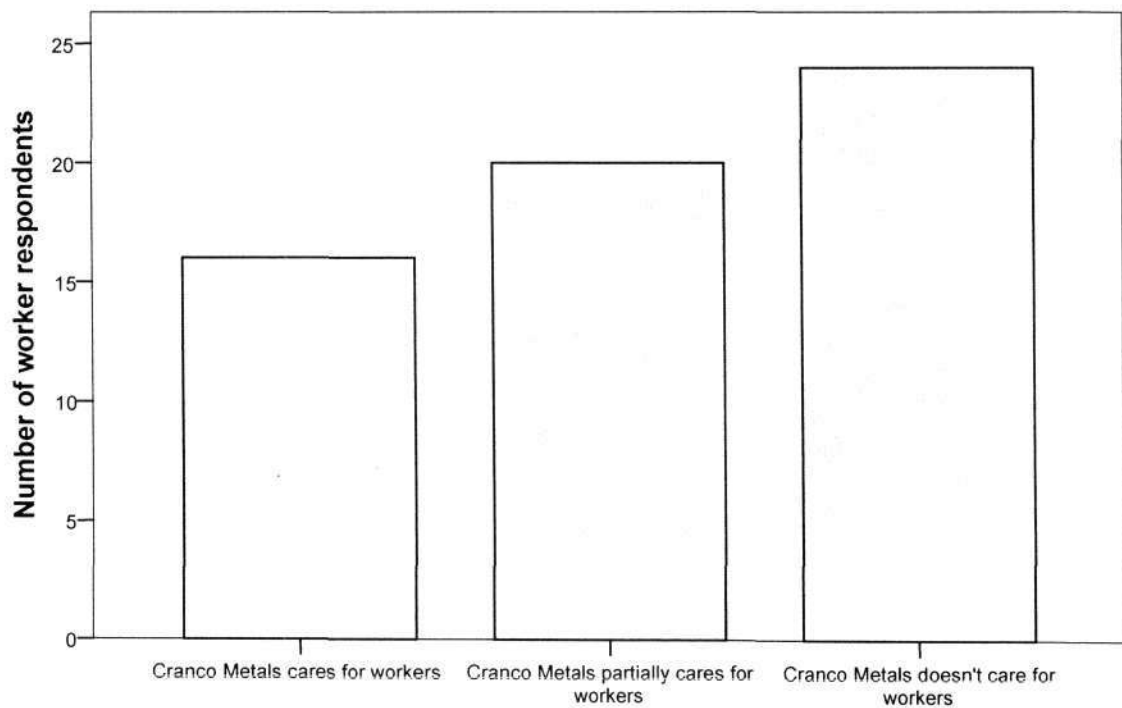
**Table 6.**

**Workers' Perceptions of the PEC's Caring Values at Cranco Metals**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Cranco Metals cares for workers	16	25.0	26.7
	Cranco Metals partially cares for workers	20	31.3	33.3
	Cranco Metals doesn't care for workers	24	37.5	40.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>93.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Figure 3**

**Workers' Perceptions of the PEC's Caring Values at Cranco Metals**



Those who felt that Cranco Metals cares for workers cited amongst others the supplying of workers with safety clothes, milk for those working in plants with high concentration of acids, food for overtime workers, tea, first aid medical services, and



safety courses as signs that show that Cranco Metals does indeed care for its workers. This can be seen in the following responses:

“Cranco Metals does care for its workers because they provide us with safety clothes and equipment to prevent us from getting injuries.”

“Yes it does care. There are courses on safety provided to workers.”

“Yes it does because they help us to prevent accidents and injuries. We also get regular medical check ups at the clinic.”

“I believe it does care because unlike before when work used to be difficult and acids were strong and workers could not get help, today there is help e.g. fresh milk is supplied to help clear the throat and we are provided with safety clothes. If you work overtime, they provide you with food and this is something that never happened before.”

On the other hand, those who felt that Cranco Metals does not care for workers cited amongst other reasons dissatisfaction with low wages; poor and dangerous working conditions; fears of retrenchments, failure to provide transport; racism; non-recognition of worker's value, experience and skills by management; being left in the same grade for too long. They thus felt that Cranco Metals' claims that it cares for its workers is just a statement on paper and that it is a simple publicity stunt. Here are some of their responses:

“According to policies written on paper, yes, but in practice no. There is no implementation. There are so many examples that show lack of care for workers. For instance, those working shifts that end at 10pm have to organise their own transport. What matters to the management is that you pitch up to work on time. They don't care whether you may get killed by *tsotsis*<sup>5</sup> or not. Cranco Metals does not care. We do not have time to rest. We work throughout, we only get about five days off. When there are family functions, you can't make it. Days for off are not enough. I cannot request for a permission because because, let's say a relative passes away, it's difficult because when you come back, they will demand that you produce a death certificate, which creates problems. Maybe *ka sekgowa but ka setso it is impossible* (this is a code switch from Sepedi to English – it translates as: “*maybe in Western culture it is possible to ask for a death certificate but in African culture it is not*”). If you fail to produce a death certificate, they would not pay you for days that you were absent from work”

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<sup>5</sup> A *tsotsi* is a slang word used in South African to refer to a criminal who mugs or robs other people.

*“Makgowa ga se ke a rata motho o moso. Ba rata fela matsogo a bona gore ba kgone go ntsha production (This is a Sepedi response with a bit of a code switch to English. It translates as: Whites never liked a black person. All they want from blacks is their hands or labour power in order to achieve production). Whites show no ubuntu. They only like you when you work but if you fall sick, they ignore you. So many people got sick and injured but were never taken care of. I once got injured but I was never compensated. I found myself helpless. My hand still does not function properly. “Tsa gore ba a re hlokomela, ke maaka, ke fela go thsela phori mahlong (this translates as: ‘that they care about us, is a lie, it is just to bluff people’).”*

“There is no truth in what they are saying. Maybe some people enjoy that care. As production workers, we are not involved. They only please themselves. I do not even check the notice boards. Nobody cares to tell me what is going on. If indeed there is something important, why can’t they come to me and explain?”

“We work shifts but we don’t have transport. We are not safe when travelling at night to work. I was shot on my leg in March as I was on walking to work at night.”

“No, it does not care. We do not get provided with transport for night shifts. We have to organise our own transport. It is expensive because we earn very little. We have to look after our families, children and their school costs and we therefore cannot afford transport fares. Two people have been killed - they got shot dead this year (i.e. 2003). One was shot in March and the other one in September while riding a bicycle to work at night. Because it is expensive, some workers prefer to either walk or ride to work and that is not safe.”

Those workers who felt that Cranco Metals cares for workers but expressed some reservations had this to say:

“Yes, Cranco Metals care about workers but it pays low wages.”

“Yes and no. The General Manager says it cares and says we should always wear safety clothes to prevent work related injuries But on the shop-floor that is not the case because we get charged by line managers who always use fill our names in the pink form.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A pink form is a charge sheet which the foremen use to record all incidents that occur on the shop-floor during work which may require further attention by the Human Resources Office for action to be taken such as disciplinary measures or warnings being issued to identified workers.

These worker respondents took a while to answer the question and when they did, this is what they said:

“The company cares because they give us half day training on safety to ensure that we are safe at work. But we hear that Cranco seeks to retrench in January next year. This does not show it cares. We end up working unfreely and could even get injured.”

Also investigated during interviews with workers was the shopfloor workers' understanding of the concept and the culture of ubuntu/botho and its core values, as well as whether or not, in their view, those values exist at Cranco Metals. This was essential to establish as the core aim of this study, namely to explore the role that the ubuntu cultural values are playing or could play in the contemporary South African workplaces. In response to the question on what ubuntu is and whether or not it exists at Cranco Metals, 31 workers felt that it does exist at Cranco Metals, 22 workers felt that it does not and 7 workers said that it does exist but in a limited way. With further probing however, it was found that of the 31 workers who felt it does exist, only 14 (i.e. 23% of respondents) agreed without any qualification that it does exist, 10 (17%) that it exist only amongst black workers and 7 (12%) that it exist only amongst some (including some white workers)(see Table 7 and Figure 4 Below).

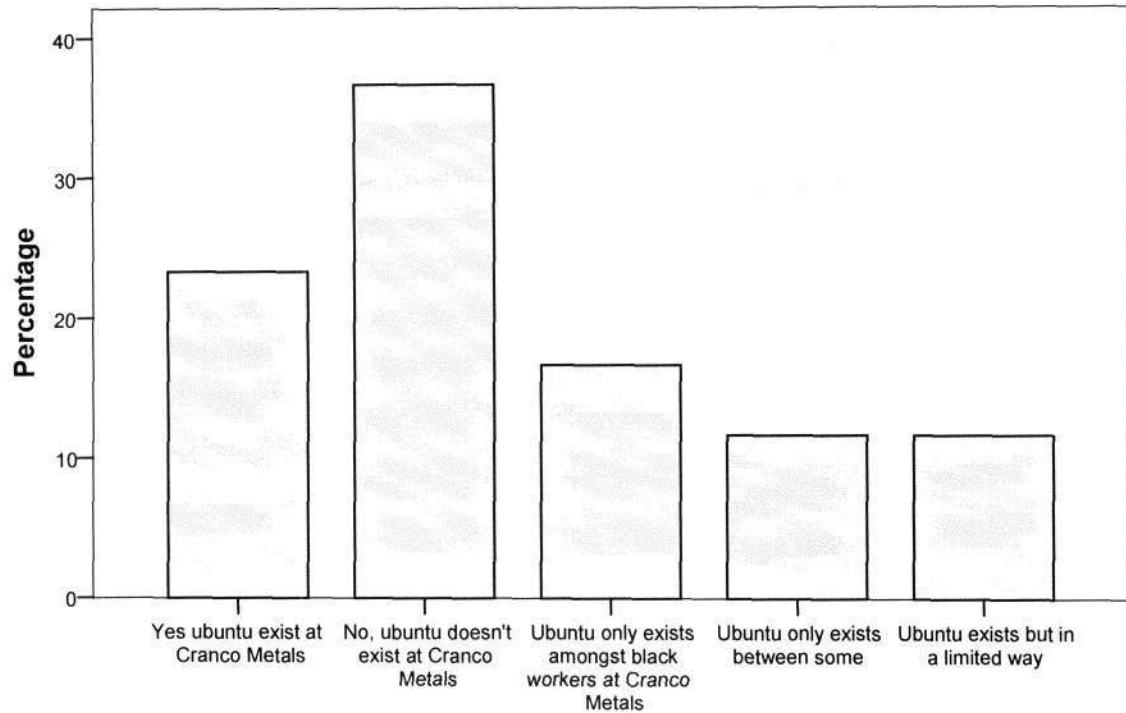
**Table 7.**

**Workers' Views on Ubuntu/botho Culture and Relevance to Cranco Metals**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes ubuntu exist at Cranco Metals	14	21.9	23.3
No, ubuntu doesn't exist at Cranco Metals	22	34.4	36.7
Ubuntu only exists amongst black workers at Cranco Metals	10	15.6	16.7
Ubuntu only exists between some	7	10.9	11.7
Ubuntu exists but in a limited way	7	10.9	11.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>93.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Figure 4.

**Workers' Views on Ubuntu/botho Culture and Relevance to Cranco Metals**



Those who felt that ubuntu values exist at Cranco Metals cited as signals of this the company's supply of free tea, safety clothes, milk, food and provision of safety training, good working relations, and also the relief and workers' rights that political liberation and democracy have brought with. Note here the following responses:

"Ubuntu means *umuntu ngumuntu nga Bantu*. It means we should help and guide each other, and also that we should respect one another. This culture still exists in the SA society. At home during death, we help each other. Here at work, a white man can greet you and even outside."

"Ubuntu means being considerate, caring and good treatment of others. Yes we have it here at work. It can be seen in how as workers we treat each other. Even management approaches us well when seeking to inform us of something new and ensures our safety at work."

"Ubuntu refers to being considerate of others. It means *umuntu ngumele azwele abanye abantu* (it is the same as being considerate). We do have it here in our plant. If someone is ill, they would release you to go home. When I was injured, they continued to pay for me."

On the other hand, those who disagreed referred to as reasons for their responses the following: racism and racial practices by white line managers, the looming retrenchments due to BEP/*Sebenza* Project, failure by the company to provide workers with transport, unfair treatment by line managers, lack of care for workers and unwillingness to listen to workers' views and attend to workers' problems, exploitation and being made to work hard, too much control by line managers, spying by line managers using informers or *izimpimpi* in the form of *baas-boys*, favouritism, and low wages. Here are some of the responses from these workers:

"Ubuntu means respect and good conduct, either shown in actions or verbal communications. It requires that people be considerate and respectful. There is no ubuntu here. Instead, there is too much whiteness. You can see it from failure by whites to listen to other people."

"Ubuntu refers to *tshwarisano le perekisano* (i.e. cooperation, joint effort and working together), if one worker has problems and cannot work, others should help him. There is no ubuntu here at Cranco Metals. There are rumours that they are going to retrench workers but top management does not come to us to explain. Top people are not closer to those of us at the bottom. This is de-motivating to us as workers. What we hear is really discouraging to us. We can't even work freely."

"Ubuntu means good cooperation and patience. Whites get upset with us but they have no chance as the new laws are at odds with them. They get upset by small things and like swearing but we just ignore them. It's an old practice. There is no ubuntu on the side of whites and it does not look like they ever will have ubuntu. Perhaps their children will"

"Ubuntu is about mutual respect. We only have a little of it here. There are still racist attitudes. Let's say I differ with a white person, if they discover that the facts point out against the white counterpart, they would suggest reconciliation. But if it is a black person who is guilty, he gets charged."

Those workers who felt that ubuntu/botho only exists between black workers gave the following responses:

"Ubuntu means being considerate. Here at Cranco Metals, it only exists amongst black workers as we help each other"

“Botho refers to kindness, respect, and no discrimination. We do have it here at work. We work well together and we co-operate as a team. I refer to black people and not whites. Whites just come, look at you and go.”

“Ubuntu means respect, *ukubekezela, ukuphathana kahle* (i.e. *patience and treating each other well*). We as workers treat each other well but the seniors do not. Our wages are low. I am telling you *ungakuqa ngamadolo phantsi uthandaze, ucele ukuthi ayilunge lento oyicelayo, aze aphuthuke amadolo* (i.e. *you can kneel down and pray that this thing – referring to demand for wage increase – is addressed but nothing is done until your knees are peeling off*).”

“Ubuntu means that people should have *lesoko* (i.e. *mercy for others*), *lerato* (i.e. *love*), and *kwano* (mutual understanding). It does exist amongst workers in our shift. But the leadership (i.e. management) does not have it. They are simply concerned about themselves and do not care about us. *Go no swana le ge mpsa e swere mmutla, motho o e lahlela lerapo e sego nama* (This is an analogy drawn by the respondent to illustrate his point about just how management does not care about workers in terms of failing to reward them for hard work and high productivity. He uses the analogy of the hunter and the dog, that when the dog catches a hare, the hunter, instead of giving a dog a piece of meat, he would throw it a bone).”

“Ubuntu means having a good heart and being considerate of others. Here at Cranco Metals it is supposed to be, but it does not exist. This can be seen from how management speak to workers. They do not care about our well being and about the fact that we have children at. Wages are very low. The superintendent says we earn a lot and therefore we do not need increases. At home, ubuntu still exists as we have a community meeting whereby we collectively discuss issues such as social services and how best to achieve delivery. At these meetings, if you have queries or feel that something is not right, you are free to ask questions and talk to have the issue resolved.”

Those who felt that ubuntu exists only amongst some made these responses:

“Ubuntu means showing *inhlonipo* (i.e. *respect*) when talking to other people. It also means *kwano* (mutual understanding). The section leader and supervisor are respectful but the foreman is not. As workers, we work like a team, *re a thusana* (i.e. *we help each other*) and we share tasks. We caution each other when there are potential dangers at work in order to prevent accidents and injuries.”

“Ubuntu refers to the way of living i.e. living according to cultural values and virtues. It is not relevant here at work as we are different and have different backgrounds.”



Those who felt that ubuntu does exist at Cranco Metals but in limited form gave the following responses:

“Ubuntu refers to working well together, cooperating and helping each other out. Here at Cranco Metals there is a little bit of it as the company rules require that we should co-operate and work together as a team. But whenever the foreman does the opposite of this, ubuntu ceases to exist”

“Ubuntu refers to having a good heart, being considerate, and wishing others good. There is some here at Cranco Metals. Sometimes the foreman has ubuntu, sometimes he shares ideas with us on how things should be done and improve. When my grandfather died in 1997, I asked for a leave of three days to go to the burial but he disputed my request, saying no one could stay for three weeks before being buried. He said that I was taking chances. I was lucky that the hostel manager intervened and I was eventually released to go and bury my old man.”

## **Chapter Six**

### **Discussion and Analysis of Findings at Cranco Metals and their Implications for Ubuntu/Botho Culture in the Workplace**

## 6.1. Analysis of the Findings

While chapter 5 presented the data and findings from the Cranco Metals case study, in this chapter, the focus will be on a critical analysis of these data and findings. This is done with the view to evaluating and establishing the extent to which the HPC values and other initiatives by senior management aimed to enhance productivity and performance at Cranco Metals have penetrated the shopfloor level, and positively influenced production relations as well as performance of work. The aim is also to establish whether or not the experiences at Cranco Metals further strengthen the case for ubuntu in the economic and business spheres, and in particular in the workplace. It was noted from the data above that in seeking to improve performance at work, management at Cranco Metals introduced the PEC strategy in order to promote collective team spirit and team work as well as co-operative working relations. This is evident in the values such as *Caring, Respect, Fairness, Integrity, and Team Work, Team Work Spirit, and Belief in People*. Shopfloor relations were thus examined to determine the degree of the impact of these values.

My analysis of the findings presented above and the evidence that arises from them suggest, however, that these virtues and values promoted in the PEC have had both a limited desirable impact and a contradictory impact on the shopfloor relations. Shopfloor production relations are strained by what are seemingly racial tensions due to what in the majority of workers' views is a racially biased treatment of black workers by white line managers. Hence, statements such as "*the foreman still behaves like in the past under apartheid*", and "*whites are harsh when they speak to blacks.*" Some respondents likened them to notoriously exploitative practices by white farmers over black farm workers as could be seen from responses such as "*there is a boeremaag supervisor here*", and "*he is a boer from the farms.*"

Also straining shopfloor production relations are authoritarian, unilateral practices by line managers on decision making on work related matters. The majority of the workers interviewed are unhappy that line managers would not allow them to have an input in decisions over work related matters, and feel that this not only undermines their intelligence (i.e. their "tacit" skills and know-how of work that they have done

over years) but that it also shows disrespect for them. This could be seen from statements such as *"the foreman does not talk to workers properly"*, *"If the foreman tells you something, he does not expect you to respond"*, *"the foreman is too controlling,"* *"As workers we need appreciation..."*, *"when we initiate ideas, they are not well received (basically not appreciated) but sooner or later you see them being implemented (shows lack of recognition)"*, and *"there is no cooperation."* Most of the workers also complain about poor or lack of quick response from line managers to faults reported by workers on the production process such as gas leakages and machine break downs. Their main concern is both with the negative impact that this has on production or performance of work and the danger that the failure to correct such faults poses to their lives.

This situation is exacerbated by the use of the repressive method of control over workers in the form of the clocking system through which workers' wages end up being docked and workers' movements are restricted. This state of production relations, together with the workers' response in the form of output restriction signalled by reduced commitment to working hard as a strategy to cope with harsh treatment by line managers, not only undermines the values that Cranco Metals' PEC is trying to inculcate amongst the production staff but also impacts negatively on production and performance levels. Such negative impact on production is clearly evident from the *Weekly UpDate* publications, my analysis of which revealed consistent failure to achieve production targets. In fact, between the months of October 2003 and February 2004, Cranco Metals fell short to achieve its production target of 57 167,1 tons of base metals by 4 396.1 tons. Only 52 771, 0 tons were produced. It was noted that, contrary to the objectives set out by the Occupational Health and Safety programme of eliminating injuries at work, less serious injuries remain a common occurrence which could partly be attributed to the evidently frustrating and distressing environment that workers are operating in as outlined above. This too, no doubt, undermines performance at work.

These poor relations due to racial tensions and the non-participatory, authoritarian style of management further inhibit communication between management and workers, which only serves to exacerbate their adversarial relationships. As was already noticed, language turned out to be the major constraining factor to effective

communication between the predominantly white management (who speak only Afrikaans and English) and black production workers (who mainly speak and are proficient in African indigenous languages such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, and South Sotho). This language situation only serves to fuel the existing tensions between white line managers and black workers by creating too many misunderstandings and tensions, and also hampers effective implementation of the measures aimed to improve production and performance. As one of the foremen pointed out, soft issues are easily turned into hard issues due to poor communication arising from the use of English, which majority of black workers cannot fully comprehend and understand. One white supervisor complained that inability to communicate due to language difficulties has resulted in instruction being given through the use of hand signals as well as having to be physically in different parts of the plant, which he saw as time consuming and affecting the efficient execution of duties on the shopfloor.

During interviews, I found that most of the workers could not communicate well with me in English. In such cases I had to resort to code-switching techniques, mixing either isiZulu or Sotho with English depending on the mother tongue of the respondents, and in some cases I found it helpful to interview workers in pairs of two with one worker speaking either isiZulu or isiXhosa and the other speaking seSotho. Both techniques worked very well for me as I still am not fully proficient in Nguni languages i.e. isiZulu and isiXhosa. This suggests that the language problem does not only lie with one party but both managers and workers, and for as long as it persists, the current relationships are unlikely to be improved and would hamper the effective implementation of PEC-based strategy. This however does not suggest that language competency is the only way out of the current situation but that it is one of those measures that could help to alleviate the situation.

Poor communication between management and workers became evident when the majority of workers (41 out of 60 workers interviewed) either showed complete ignorance or a limited knowledge and/or understanding of the management-initiated BEP or *Sebenza* Project, developed as a response to the financially difficult situation which Cranco Metals found itself in and aimed to improve performance and productivity. Although workers were generally willing to co-operate with

management to ensure that Cranco Metals remains a viable and profitable company, notwithstanding their disapproval of the management style, especially the line managers', it became clear that they were deeply concerned and discouraged by the "rumours" that the Project had as one of its measures to cut down costs by laying off or retrenching some of them. This depleted morale amongst the workers and created fear, uncertainty and anger that it is simply aimed to intensify exploitation and further marginalisation of workers and shows that management does not appreciate their effort and commitment to ensuring that Cranco Metals remains viable and profitable.

In fact, what the *Sebenza* Project seems to have been able to achieve is the creation of distance or division between workers and management, and creation of feelings of alienation amongst workers contrary to forging common identity and vision as well as a sense of collective identity, team spirit and team effort. This division and alienation is clearly discernable from workers' responses in which there is a strong sense of "us" and "them" feeling. Note in those responses to the question on the *Sebenza* Project, workers referring to management in terms such as "They..." and "Their *Sebenza* ..." clearly showing that they do not identify with the project as it is meant to benefit management at their expense. Owing to this and the unfair treatment that workers are receiving from line managers, the majority felt that Cranco Metals does not care about their wellbeing and welfare.

## **6.2. Implications for Ubuntu/Botho at Cranco Metals**

I found it so striking that some, if not most of the humanistic values and principles, embodied in Cranco Metals' Performance Enhancement Culture (PEC) are remarkably similar to the core values that define the indigenous African culture of ubuntu or botho. The PEC's values and principles such as "caring", "respect", "integrity", "fairness", "team work and spirit" and "belief in people", although some phrased differently, are no doubt common to ubuntu's core values of "respect", "solidarity", "compassion", "human dignity", and "interdependence" (see Mduli, 1987; Mbigi and Maree, 1995; and Kamwangamalu, 1999). The question that arises here however and that needs to be tackled is: does the fact that both the Cranco Metals' PEC and the indigenous African culture of ubuntu share more or less similar



values and principles necessarily discredit and nullify the view that the ubuntu values hold a great potential to transform the current workplace culture, workplace strategies and relations in order to enhance improved productivity and performance?

In response to this question, I would argue that it would be both premature and problematic to arrive at this inference and dismiss the potential role of ubuntu in the workplace. Although the values promoted by the PEC at Cranco Metals are ubuntu-like in outlook, the approach used by the management to both develop and implement the PEC is however not consistent with ubuntu and has instead led to disagreements which undermine the implementation of the PEC.

It is clear from the evidence presented above that the approach used by senior management was top-down. Although all the parties at Cranco Metals (i.e. production workers, senior and line management, and all trade unions) agree that the values promoted by the PEC are ideal and should be supported, the approach used has however led to disputes and resistance from the NUM, the biggest union at Cranco Metals with a membership which consists predominantly of black production workers. As was observed, the implementation process is plagued by NUM's claims that management used racial preferences in employing consultants to promote the PEC, concerns that there was no transparency in terms of amount paid to the current consultant as opposed to the amount that Dr. Afrika charged, and that management is failing to observe and comply with equity requirements when hiring the services of outside consultants. This resistance by NUM suggest that there is no consensus and co-operation over the PEC. This has no doubt hampered the PEC's implementation and its desired effect on the shopfloor.

The differences between Cranco Metals PEC and the ubuntu culture do not only lie in the different approaches used, but also in the fact that, unlike the PEC, the ubuntu values are centred on the cardinal virtues and beliefs of interdependence and communalism. These beliefs are expressed in the maxim "I am because you are and you are because I am" or put differently "a man can only be or is a man through others" which are essentially direct translations from African language expressions such as in isiZulu "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu/ngabanye" and in Sepedi "motho ke motho ka batho". It is on these cardinal beliefs that all other key defining values of

ubuntu culture rest. As Sekou Toure (quoted in Gyeke, 1987) asserted, Africa is fundamentally “communocratic”. These virtues recognise the interdependence between individuals and communities, amongst individuals, and amongst communities (see Togni, 1996). They attach great value to humanity and prioritise people before anything else. They promote those human and socio-economic actions that are not detrimental but beneficial to communities and individuals. The significance of the presence and recognition of these virtues and beliefs is that they also enable people to transcend a simple talk about the ubuntu values by consciously identifying with and living those values in their day-to-day interactions and activities.

The evidence presented above on Cranco Metals, which points to workers and NUM’s perceptions of line managers as being racist, authoritarian, unappreciative of workers’ efforts at work, disrespectful of workers, and showing little regard for workers’ interests and concerns, showing little or no recognition of workers’ ideas (by unilaterally making decisions on work related matters) and contribution to the company over many years (most workers remaining in the same grade for years), and the expressed workers’ concerns and fears of the looming retrenchments; is a clear signal of the absence of these cardinal virtues of ubuntu within the PEC. The absence of these virtues sets ubuntu culture apart from Cranco Metals’ PEC or even any other foreign-inspired (be them Western or East Asian) humanistic management and workplace strategies aimed to stabilise working relations and create an environment conducive to improving performance and productivity.

I would further argue, based on the understanding of these key virtues in the ubuntu culture, that their presence at Cranco Metals could have made a significant difference since all productivity and performance enhancing strategies would have been informed and anchored in them. Observance of these virtues would have informed the approach of the PEC by making it participatory and bottom-up rather than unilateral and top-down. Similarly, the BEP or *Sebenza* Project would have been founded on consensus and secured full co-operation from black workers and their union (NUM), as its aim would be to benefit all stakeholders as opposed to benefiting some while victimising or sacrificing others. This takes us back to Mbigi and Maree(1995)’s “ubuntu developmental model” or the MIST principles anchored in the ubuntu/botho culture and their argument that, informed by such model or principles, the

managements would appreciate that wealth creation is a collective effort which rests on continuous improvement of everything and active participation by all members of organisation, but also that all those involved should be treated with respect and dignity.

The above clearly presents a case for the need to experiment with and integrate the ubuntu values into the organisational and workplace strategies for improving working relations, work performance and productivity. Ubuntu-inspired or ubuntu-based approaches and strategies at Cranco Metals could enable management to not only appreciate and recognise opportunities available, but also to take full advantage of those opportunities to improve production relations and performance, as illuminated by the evidence gathered. Amongst such opportunities, which have so far not been fully exploited, is a clear evidence of a changed attitudes on the part of the historically militant black workers organised by NUM from adversarialism to the expressed willingness and desire, in line with the new democratic dispensation, to co-operate with management to make South Africa a winning nation. This is what Von Holdt (1996) has observed as evidence of shift from the culture of resistance or resistance politics towards the culture of productivity or productivity politics.

This changed attitude is also informed and enhanced by workers' material and socio-psychological needs. Workers stated that, in spite of the harsh treatment and unpleasant working conditions, they were happy to work at Cranco Metals as it not only enables them to earn a living for themselves and their families, but also keeps them busy and away from boredom. As was noticed, most workers are in their 30s and 40s and are married, thus implying that they have family responsibilities as bread winners. This suggests that there already exists, amongst these workers the zeal and commitment to work, which needs to be built upon and further expanded to enhance the creation and promotion of a common vision and objective to strive to make Cranco Metals a viable and profitable company.

Another opportunity identified lies in the long tenure of workers at Cranco Metals, which suggests that the majority of the workforce is skilled and highly experienced. This constitutes a rich human resource or skills capacity which has evidently not fully been tapped into and creatively utilised due to the unilateral, authoritarian practices of

line managers, perceived racism by workers, poor communication and the top-down approach used by senior management when initiating strategies for productivity and performance improvement. To tap into this resource (i.e. a tacitly skilled workforce), the management would also have to address workers' concerns about staying in the same grade for too long without being adequately rewarded with promotions, better remuneration, and other financial incentives.

Although, and as evidenced in the *Weekly UpDate*, the management regularly expresses recognition of workers who are showing commitment to upholding the Cranco Metals' PEC and Occupational Health and Safety values and principles through their actions, this is clearly not adequate to motivate workers without material incentives and better treatment by line management. Senior management also needs to improve communication with both workers and line management through regular direct contacts, in order to ensure that line managers do not wield unilateral powers and control over decision makings on work-related matters as well as to ensure that workers are empowered and co-operation prevails between the two parties. To further enhance this, the current training offered to line managers would have to be improved and expanded to ensure that they are fully and adequately equipped with the relevant people management skills.

These opportunities could however be offset and undermined by some of the constraints which constitute major challenges. These constraints and challenges include the apparent lack of co-operation between top management and NUM (the biggest union organising black African shopfloor production workers) due to, amongst others, the perception held by NUM's members and leaders that management is not fully committed to equity. This perception is clearly in contrast with management's view that Cranco Metals has made headway towards achieving equity targets. These different views on the equity question at Cranco Metals has become the matter of dispute between NUM and management, and has generated tensions and conflicts, which are likely to continue to occur and further strain labour relations as well as hampering performance and productivity improvement efforts.

Language is also one of the major constraints facing Cranco Metals. As evidence shows, effective communication between white line managers and black workers was hampered by the inability of both groups to speak each other's language. On the one hand, white managers can only speak English and Afrikaans and, on the other, the majority of black workers, while speaking several indigenous African languages, do not however speak either Afrikaans or English. Those (i.e. black workers) who can, only do so limitedly, which is still not adequate for efficient communication. This has led to social distance on the shopfloor, the escalation of racial perceptions and attitudes, more tensions and disputes, and growing mistrust. This, together with the unilateral practices, also resulted in the creation of an "us" and "them" scenario which makes team spirit and team work difficult to be realised. Production and work related matters could also not be efficiently addressed and resolved to ensure smoother production relations and production flow.

Perhaps, an even greater challenge and constraint lies in the current dominant neo-liberal national and international discourse and policy frameworks. This, I would argue, was clearly evident in the contradictions within and undesirable outcomes of Cranco Metals' BEP or *Sebenza* Project. Through this project, the management, while seeking to secure workers' co-operation in finding solutions to business problems, simultaneously planned to cut labour costs by retrenching workers. Such neo-liberal measures are not consistent with the virtues and principles of the ubuntu culture, and rather than securing workers' co-operation and commitment, they further alienate them by creating uncertainty, fear of losing their jobs, and tensions.

### **6.3. Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter, the current organisational, workplace culture at Cranco Metals has been examined. This was done with the view two main objectives. First to determine its impact on work performance and workplace participation and secondly whether or not, based on the assessment of the effectiveness of the existing culture in terms of enhancing the achievement of the abovementioned goals, there is a strong case for the need to integrate and experiment with the ubuntu cultural values in the workplace in order to enhance the achievement of these objectives. As can be seen from the

findings, Cranco Metals has in place as its organisational workplace culture the PEC and employs a wide range of complementary strategies to promote the implementation of this culture as well as to get its workers and line managers to live its values. This no doubt signals concern and commitment on the side of the senior management to address performance issues by ensuring that the ideal HPC values are accepted and lived by both workers and line managers on a day-to-day basis. It has been mentioned that the PEC's values are remarkably similar to those of the African indigenous culture of ubuntu. It was noticed however that, notwithstanding this, the two cultures are distinctive and dissimilar in terms of the basis of their core values. Unlike the PEC, the ubuntu culture's core values and principles are anchored in and centred on the cardinal beliefs of communalism and interdependence. The significance of these cardinal virtues, expressed through the maxim of "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye*", is that they help to actualise and enhance the living of the ubuntu values in daily activities. The support and presence of these virtues at Cranco Metals, I argue, could have eliminated those factors that inhibited the effective implementation of the PEC and its desired impact on the shopfloor. Those factors include the top-down, unilateral approach used by senior management on the PEC strategy, especially in implementing and promoting it; and the unilateral style of management used by line manager, which would have been substituted with participatory style and approach to work-related decision makings.

Thus, informed by these beliefs, the BEP/*Sebenza* Project would have been approached differently and sensitively in order to ensure that its outcomes are not achieved at the expense of the workers. This would have helped to accord the project legitimacy amongst the workers and enhanced its wider acceptance by all stakeholders. I nevertheless argued that while evidence at Cranco Metals presents a case for ubuntu-based or inspired approach, there are however both opportunities and constraints, the latter of which constitute a challenge. I argue that in the light of the failure of the HPC and complementary strategies such as the BEP/*Sebenza* Project, which are typical Western-type humanistic business management strategies and interventions, founded on neo-liberal principles of cost cutting, the case for the need to experiment with the less tested, if not untested strategies and approaches such as the ubuntu-based or ubuntu-inspired ones, is strengthened. Hence the innovative and creative integration and fusion of the ubuntu values with other progressive workplace

strategies and approaches could help enhance both the effective addressing of the constraints and the challenges identified in workplaces such as Cranco Metals, and the utilization of the opportunities for improved workplace relations, participation and operational excellence. These findings at Cranco Metals reinforce the arguments I arrived at in the preceding chapter four based on the review of literature and debates in SA, as they point out to both opportunities and constraints similar in nature.



# **Chapter Seven**

## **A Critical Discussion, Review and Analysis of the Overall Findings**

## **7.1. Culture and Economy: the link between them**

Ray and Sayer (1999) assert that the dawn of the twenty first century has been characterised by a new trend towards the cultural turn. This has been signified by the growing interest displayed by both managements and academics in the question of relationships between culture and economy as autonomous but interlinked spheres of life. Hence the notion that economic activities are culturally embedded reinforces the evidence that arose in the theoretical review in chapter one of this thesis. It was noted there that although culture and economy exert an influence on each other, the two aspects of life are autonomous from each other. Thus Weber's idea of culture as constituting a higher sphere and Durkheim's idea of common culture both lay emphasis on culture as autonomous. It further emerged in the review that Marx and Engels also acknowledged the equally significant role that cultural ideal elements and material economic forces play within human society and in change and development.

Thompson and Findlay (1999) maintain that this trend is not new but has a long history that stretches far back into the early twentieth century, as is witnessed by the 1920s USA's "welfare capitalist models" and the British "corporate paternalistic" strategies. Proceeding from this premise, they thus argue that this trend should be considered more as a cultural *return* than a cultural turn. Marx Weber made the initial observation of the mutually reinforcing and influential relationships between societal values and the economic life. In his account of the development of modern capitalism in the nineteenth century in Western Europe, Weber found the main driving force to have been the unique rational spirit of capitalism informed and shaped by the ascetic Protestant Ethic that arose from the religious teachings of Calvinism (Weber, 1922; 1930-1967). Notwithstanding this vital contribution by Weber, his claims and attitude towards other world religions as being irrational and inimical to progressive economic development are, however, unsustainable and without basis. In this regard, he wrote:

"At all events, no motivation toward a rational system for the methodical control of life flowed from Buddhist, Taoist, or Hindu piety... None of these mass religions of Asia ... provided the motives or orientations for a rationalized ethical patterning of the creaturely world in accordance with divine commandments. Rather, they all accepted this world as eternally given, and so the best of all possible worlds...'Capitalism' existed among all these

religions...But there was no 'capitalist spirit', in the sense that is distinctive of ascetic Protestantism...At the present time, all these peoples import economic rationalism as the most important product of the Occident, and their capitalistic development is impeded only by the presence among them of rigid traditions...The impediments to the development of capitalism must be sought primarily in the domain of religion...Only ascetic Protestantism completely eliminated magic and the supernatural quest for salvation, of which the highest form was intellectualist, contemplative illumination. It alone created religious motivations for seeking salvation primarily through immersion in one's worldly vocation (*Beruf*). This Protestant stress upon the methodically rationalized fulfilment of one's vocational responsibility was diametrically opposed to Hinduism's strongly traditionalistic concept of vocations. For the various popular religions of Asia, in contrast to ascetic Protestantism, the world remained a great enchanted garden, in which the practical way to orient oneself or to find security in this world or next, was to revere or coerce the spirits and seek salvation through ritualistic, idolatrous, or sacramental procedures. No path led from the magical religiosity of the non-intellectual classes of Asia to a rational, methodical control of life. Nor did any path lead to that methodical control from the world accommodation of Confucianism. From the world-rejection of Buddhism, from the world-conquest of Islam, or from the messianic expectations and economic pariah law of Judaism"(Weber, 1922: 268-270).

This view is not only disputable but also dismissible in the light of the evidence that arose from the review in chapter two of debates around the relationship between the value systems and economic development in the South East and East Asian regions. It was noted from the review that the Confucian values have and continue to play an instrumental role in the economic life and development not only in the East Asian region but also in trans-border or national economic activities such as in Singapore (Ayal, 1963; O'Malley, 1988; Zhan, 1988; Kwan Lee, 1997; Chaibong, 1999; Sen, 2001, and Dahles, 2003). This view held by Weber was similarly challenged by Sitas (1997). Note here Sitas's critique of Weber's thesis:

"Capitalism's emergence, its calculating rationality and its accumulating ethos was seen to be peculiar to Europe, and this 'emergence' was due, in part at least, to the self-discipline, asceticism and motivation of what he termed its 'Protestant Ethic'. By the 1960s Weber's exploration of world religions, economic rationality and development were being turned into parodies through theories of 'modernisation'. These theories described a necessary evolution from 'traditional' to 'modern' societies which demanded a change in occupational roles and cultural values, for as long as the communal ties of the past marked the lives of ordinary people, backwardness was to be their lot. The flattening of world's cultures and their histories into a 'traditional society' or a 'pre-capitalist' – mush, was not only 'Euro-centric' in

conception, empirically wrong, and self-serving. It also missed the point that other values could be more dynamic as environments for accumulation than European ones; societies in which Islam, Buddhism and Confucianism flourish have not been strangers to economic growth” (Sitas, 1997: 101).

Weber’s analysis is also challengeable in the light of the review of indigenous traditional African cultures and thought systems. It was noted that while there is a concession to the view that African countries are indeed lagging behind in terms of scientific, technological and economic development, the view held Tempel (1997); Horton (1997) and Gyeke (1997) that indigenous the traditional African cultures and thought systems are an obstacle to growth and development could however not be sustained. This was so in view of the counter arguments that present the evidence that points to the history of scientific and technological discoveries as well as economic practices that had the potential to develop into modern forms, but were interrupted by colonial intrusions and subjugations. Hence the indigenous traditional African cultures and thought systems, like those of other worlds such as Europe, contain within the elements that enhance and those inhibit progress and growth (see for instance Wiredu, 1986; Hallen, 1996; Makang, 1997; Amato, 1997; and Sogolo, 1998).

## **7.2. The Case for Economic Role and Relevance of the Ubuntu/Botho Culture**

In the light of the above critiques, it becomes difficult to dismiss and overlook the seriousness of the view and/or claim that the ubuntu or botho culture has a positive role to play in the economic development of the contemporary South African society. This is especially so as this culture formulates part of both other African cultures and those cultures of the less developed world which were historically considered as being ‘backward’, ‘traditional’, ‘pre-capitalist’ and inimical to progress and accumulation, and thus subsequently marginalised.

Noteworthy here is Sitas’ argument in his analysis of the historical evolution of and the various changes that sociology underwent or to put it differently, the various schools of thought that characterised Sociology in SA, which essentially illustrates

this kind of attitude and thinking towards cultures and people in the third world and/or in the less developed world. According to Sitas, prior to the 1970s in SA, the dominant school of thought in sociology and social sciences was that led by those he calls ‘apologists of segregation and apartheid’ and ‘pseudo-scientists’, who held the view that questioned the capacity of black people to be modern, good and disciplined workers, and thus presented them as being a ‘culturally backward labour force’ entrapped by “chains of traditionalism” (Sitas, 1997: 101). Several other analysts have highlighted this racial attitude which they argue still persist in contemporary SA. Wilson and Klaaste, for instance, made this argument based on their observations:

“...it will take many long years for South Africans not to see the colour on the faces of their compatriots and not to judge them according to the fundamental maxim of apartheid; Whites are better and Blacks are backward” (Wilson and Klaaste, 1996: 210).

Similarly, Human (1996) asserts that “...apartheid has created or reinforced an ‘us’ and ‘them’ syndrome where Black culture is looked upon as inappropriate to the business world”.

These stereotyped racial attitudes are also challenged on the basis of the creolist perspective which asserts that, like the cultures and value systems of the developed world, those of the third world countries and/or the less developed or developing world (the ubuntu/botho culture here included) also matter and could be a positive force in development. According to this perspective, cultural diversity achieved from creative and innovative fusion of various cultures, could present new intellectual challenges that would serve as a source of vitality, strength and dynamism necessary for growth and development (see Hannerz, 1997). Further strengthening the ubuntu/botho case is the evidence presented by Ngubane (1963 and 1979) which indicates that the ubuntu/botho cultural values have played an instrumental role in the anti-colonial/apartheid political liberation struggle, and also in the black workers’ struggle against colonial and apartheid-capitalist exploitation at the workplace level (see Gordon, 1977; Sitas, 1982 and 1996; and Mdluli, 1990), with the former dating as far back in history as the late twentieth century. This is even further strengthened by arguments that the ubuntu/botho culture predates the colonial era and that it has always been and continues to be influential in the lives of African people, having

proved its resilience over the decades of colonial subjugation and marginalisation (see Ngubane, 1963 and 1979; Nzimande, 1988; Mbigi and Maree, 1995; and Kamwangamalu, 1999).

The phenomenon that Sitas (1997) referred to as the “New Labour Studies” in South African sociology during the 1970s should be seen as initial signals of the cultural turn within the social sciences and academia, albeit for different reasons and motives to those that informed pro-apartheid sociology. This new school of thought, Webster (1991: 3) argued, had as its main priority to “understand ...the subjective experience of work” (quoted in Sitas, 1997: 102). In Natal, Sitas argues, this new school of thought:

“... sought to look at people and workers, not as commodities, but as a social force ...” and as “... groupings with cultural significance, and individuals with private, social needs ‘and the creative energy to participate fully in cultural and political life’.” (a quote from Webster, 1991: 3)

Such an emphasis moved from the abstractions: ‘factor of production’, ‘abstract labour power’, to viewing working people’s lives from the perspective of the concrete, the qualitative, what I have termed, the ‘cultural formation’” (Sitas, 1997: 102). Thus, attempts by managements in SA enterprises to promote co-operative working and production relations with the view to creating conditions under which work performance and productivity could be improved through participatory workplace strategies, especially in the 1980s throughout to the present period, should be considered as part of the trend towards cultural turn.

This suggests that, as in other capitalist countries, the cultural turn is no new phenomenon to South Africa. This could be seen from a growing wave of management literature and publications by Knowledge Resources such as the “African Dream in Management” (1997) authored by a well-known management consultant Lovemore Mbigi and “Cultural Synergy in South Africa - Weaving strands of Africa and Europe” (1996), business magazines such as the Enterprise and business schools housed at some of SA’s prominent universities such as the Wits Business School and UNISA School of Business Leadership. Evidence of this trend is revealed

by Burgemeister's (2004) investigation of the so-called ubuntu philosophy and humanistic managerial approaches in South African industrial corporations and workplaces. Burgemeister found that all of the 57 companies he selected for his study, developed either a unique organisational workplace culture and strategy to foster and support that organisational culture, or have developed one of the two i.e. organisational culture or participatory workplace strategy. His study took the form of a survey through which he examined the web pages of the selected companies and followed up with telephonic interviews with 16 of those companies' management representatives in order to obtain further information to supplement web page based information. The resultant management strategies aimed at improving workplace relations, productivity and performance, however, experienced little success (see Loet Douwes Dekker, 1987 and 1991; Maller, 1992; Barret, 1993; Bethalem, 1994; Buhlungu, 1994; Webster, 1995; Mapadimeng, 1998 in chapter four). Cranco Metals, as an illustrative case study, should not be seen in isolation but within the context of these other failed initiatives.

### **7.3. The South African Workplace, Cranco Metals and Ubuntu/Botho Culture**

#### **7.3.1. Opportunities for Ubuntu/Botho Culture in the Workplace**

One of the striking findings at Cranco Metals is that most of the humanistic values and principles embodied in its Performance Enhancement Culture (PEC) are remarkably similar to the core values that define the indigenous African culture of ubuntu or botho. These are the PEC's values and principles such as "caring", "respect", "integrity", "fairness", "team work and spirit" and "belief in people", are no doubt common to ubuntu/botho's core values of "respect", "solidarity", "compassion", "human dignity", and "interdependence" (see Mduli, 1987; Mbigi and Maree, 1995; and Kamwangamalu, 1999).

In the light of the extensive insight established in chapter four on what ubuntu/botho culture is and constitutes, and the findings of an in-depth inquiry and probing conducted at Cranco Metals during my study, it would be premature and misleading to suggest that those greater similarities necessarily imply that the PEC is necessarily



anchored in the ubuntu/botho culture. One of the areas of difference between the PEC and ubuntu/botho lies in the approach that the senior management used to both develop and implement the PEC. This approach is top-down and thus not consistent with ubuntu/botho person-oriented principles that attach primacy to human personality and encourage individuals to appreciate other individuals' potential to give help in the battle for survival (see Ngubane, 1963).

This top-down approach could not enable the senior management to recognise and appreciate, as was established during my field work, that all other parties at Cranco Metals including production workers and their trade unions were keen to be guided by values similar to those promoted by the PEC. This was therefore in a way a lost opportunity for the senior management as they could have benefited from workers and trade unions' input on how the organisational and workplace culture, in this case PEC, should be approached and implemented to enhance the achievement of the desired outcomes for mutual benefits to both workers and management. The top-down approach used was met with resistance and non-co-operation from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), the biggest trade union at Cranco Metals with a membership that is predominantly black production workers. The implementation process was disrupted by NUM's claims that management used racial preferences in employing consultants to promote the PEC; concerns that there was no transparency in terms of amount paid to the current consultant as opposed to the amount that Dr Afrika, the black African consultant, charged; and that management is failing to observe and comply with equity requirements when hiring the services of outside consultants. This resistance by NUM suggest that there is lack of consensus and co-operation over the PEC. This has no doubt hampered the PEC's implementation and its desired effect on the shopfloor.

The differences between Cranco Metals' PEC and the ubuntu/botho culture do not lie only in the divergent approaches used but also in the fact that, unlike the PEC, the botho/ubuntu's person-centred values are anchored in the cardinal virtues and beliefs of interdependence and communalism. These beliefs are expressed in the maxim "I am because you are and you are because I am" or put differently "a man can only be or is a man through others" which are essentially direct translations from African language expressions such as in isiZulu "*umuntu ngumunt ngabantu/ngabanye*" and in

Sepedi “*motho ke motho ka batho*”. It is on these cardinal beliefs that all other key defining values of ubuntu culture rest. As Sekou Toure (quoted in Gyeke(1987) asserted, Africa is fundamentally “communocratic”. These virtues recognise the interdependence between individuals and communities, amongst individuals, and amongst communities (see Togni, 1996). As Ngubane has pointed, ubuntu/botho’s cultural virtues are person-oriented and thus attach great value to humanity. They promote those human and socio-economic actions that are not detrimental but beneficial to communities and individuals. The significance of the presence and recognition of these virtues and beliefs is that they also enable people to transcend a simple talk about the ubuntu values by consciously identifying with and living those values in their day-to-day interactions and activities. Clearly, the ubuntu/botho has virtues and values that embody what Ayal (1963) terms propensities. In this case these propensities are, for instance, to unite rather than divide (the values of solidarity, interdependence) and to accumulate but for the collective good (Refer to pages 239 and 240 in this chapter for an outline of types of indigenous African modes of accumulation).

The above evidence on Cranco Metals points to the absence of these cardinal virtues and other related ones such as compassion, human dignity, respect, and solidarity of ubuntu within the PEC. This can be seen from workers and NUM’s perceptions of line managers as being racist, authoritarian, unappreciative of workers’ efforts at work, disrespectful of workers, and showing little regard for workers’ interests and concerns, showing little or no interest in workers’ ideas (by unilaterally making decisions on work related matters) and their contribution to the company over many years (most workers remaining in the same grade for years); and the expressed workers’ concerns and fears of the looming retrenchments. Also showing the absence of these virtues and values, especially lack of compassion and care, is the failure by management to provide night shift workers with transport to and from work. Workers either walk to and from work or ride to work on bicycles at night. They reported in their responses instances of attacks on them as well as robberies and muggings by criminals.

The absence of these person-oriented virtues sets botho culture apart from Cranco Metals' PEC or even any other foreign-inspired (be them Western or East Asian) humanistic management and workplace strategies aimed to stabilise working relations and create an environment conducive to improving performance and productivity. I further argue, based on the understanding of these key virtues in the ubuntu culture, that their presence at Cranco Metals might have made a significant difference since productivity and performance enhancing strategies would have been informed and anchored in them (i.e. the ubuntu values and principles). Observance of these virtues would have informed the approach to the PEC by making it participatory and bottom-up so that broader consensus was established rather than the unilateral and top-down one which in the end led to resistance and conflicts. Thus the BEP or *Sebenza* Project would have been either averted as it tends to be an obstacle to the effective implementation of the PEC or conceptualised differently from its current outlook. This is particularly so as it is evident that the current dominant neo-liberal capitalist system, practices and strategies that aim to maximise profits through measures such as labour cost cuts, retrenchments and precarious labour markets for workers are incompatible with the spirit of ubuntu/botho and its guiding values and principles.

While the evidence established so far points to significant differences between ubuntu/botho culture and the Cranco Metals' PEC as well as to the greater absence of ubuntu/botho on the part of management, it should however be noted that amongst black workers, there is a strong evidence of ubuntu/botho's existence. Its existence amongst workers is mainly instrumental to their collective survival and resistance to exploitation. In their responses, workers pointed out that they help each other at work - as represented in responses such as "*si ya bambisan*" (in isiZulu) (in English meaning "we help each other") - to ensure that they not only cope with work pressure but also that they do not fall victim to ever-present dangers of accidents at work due to the falling of heavy objects or acidic gas leakages and fumes. In another plant, which is heavily labour intensive, workers pointed out that one way in which they cope with work is by guarding against the foreman to ensure that he does not catch them off guard relaxed and chatting.

In my earlier study (Mapadimeng, 2000) in which I had interviews with some of the workers at ISCOR, their responses were similar. They, for instance indicated that, as they are not well paid, they see no point in putting extra effort in their work and have thus resorted to the *output restriction* strategy. They pointed out that to limit productivity and performance; they deliberately leave a gap in their work. To put it in their own language, which is essentially a township Zulu version, they said “*si shiya imbhovo*” (i.e. “we leave a gap in our work”).

In doing so, they avoid finishing earlier and having to be referred to other tasks. This, they argued, not only helped in reducing effort into work and therefore performance, but also enabled them to prolong what is necessarily easy work that could be completed within half a day into a day-long activity. Thus, their aim is only to meet the minimum set target for the day and not to exceed as it would only benefit management. This is the epitome of the private world of workers that, according to Gordon (1988), management and employers are unaware of. It shows the control that workers have over their work and their work situation enhanced by their tacit skills and knowledge of work acquired over years of exposure and experience.

Similar findings were made through other sociological studies such as Maller (1992)’s study at the Volkswagen South Africa car plant in the Eastern Cape Province. Maller found that shopfloor workers, using their “working knowledge”, were able to exert some control over their work through manipulation of their work arrangements. As she points out:

“... workers exerted a certain degree on individual job control. They were not able to dictate the pace of work because this was determined the speed of the assembly line, yet they were able to cover each other while two other workers engaged in an illicit game of draughts at the side of the assembly line”(Maller, 1992: 143).

This suggests that these collective forms of overt resistance and survival by black workers, which as I have already mentioned are shaped by the ubuntu/botho cultural virtues, are not new but have deep historical roots in SA. While workers used them to shape their solidarities, management manipulated them to exert control over workers. Note here, for instance, *colonial managerialism* and the abuse of the *induna system*

that has its roots in the indigenous African political leadership system led by traditional leaders or chiefs (see Moodie (1994); Sitas(1996). This also suggests however that it is possible to positively integrate the ubuntu/botho culture, provided that all potential constraints and dangers of abuses identified are addressed to transform this inherited destructive situation into a constructive, mutually beneficial one.

The evidence of the presence of the ubuntu/botho culture amongst black workers challenges Kamwangamalu's claim that this culture has been eroded by the apartheid system. This claim is also challengeable on the basis of the ubuntu/botho culture's resilience as could be seen from its survival of the destruction of its political and social institutions as well as the physical dislocations under colonial intrusion (see Ngubane, 1963, Nzimande, 1988).

The above therefore presents a case for the need to experiment with and integrate the ubuntu values into the organisational and workplace strategies for improving working relations, work performance and productivity. Ubuntu-inspired or ubuntu-based approaches and strategies at Cranco Metals could enable management not only to appreciate and recognise opportunities available, but also to take full advantage of those opportunities to improve production relations and performance, as illuminated by the evidence gathered. Amongst such opportunities, which have so far not been fully utilised, is a clear evidence of the changed attitudes on the part of the historically militant black workers organised by NUM from adversarialism to the expressed willingness and desire, in line with the new democratic dispensation, to co-operate with management and make South Africa a winning nation. This changed attitude is also informed and enhanced by workers' material and socio-psychological needs. In their responses, workers stated that in spite of the harsh treatment and unpleasant working conditions, they were happy to work at Cranco Metals as it not only enables them to earn a living for themselves and their families, but also keeps them busy and away from boredom. As was noticed, most workers are in their 30s and 40s and are married, thus implying that they have family responsibilities as breadwinners. This suggests that there already exists, amongst these workers the zeal and commitment to work, which needs to be built upon and further expanded to enhance the creation and

promotion of a common vision and objective to strive to make Cranco Metals a viable and profitable company.

Another opportunity identified lies in workers' long tenure at Cranco Metals, which suggests that the majority of Cranco Metals' workforce is skilled and highly experienced. This constitutes a rich human resource capacity with "tacit" skills that has evidently not fully been tapped into and creatively utilised. Research in SA workplaces has found that black workers' 'tacit' skills i.e. the skills acquired from work based on experience, were historically overlooked and unrecognised by employers and managements in spite of their importance to getting the work done efficiently and productively (see Maller, 1992). As Moodie (1994:17) indicates, Leger's (1992) study of SA mines found that black miners used such skills, which he calls "pit sense" to ensure their own safety by detecting imminent collapses from rock behaviour.

To tap into this resource capacity, the management would also have to address workers' concerns about staying in the same grade for too long without being adequately rewarded with promotions, better remuneration, and other financial incentives. Although, and as evidenced in the *Weekly UpDate*, the management regularly expresses recognition of workers who are showing commitment to upholding the Cranco Metals' PEC and Occupational Health and Safety values and principles through their actions; this is clearly not adequate to motivate workers without material incentives and better treatment by line management. This is in line with Macun (1995)'s argument that one of the major challenges facing managements in SA in as far as improving work performance and productivity is concerned, is to find a way of unlocking *effort* on the part of workers as this determines "how much activity workers engage in, the pace and the quality of work that goes into various activities". This, Macun argues, can partly be achieved through improved wages for workers and other forms of remunerative incentives such as profit-sharing schemes.

Also critical is the need for the senior management to improve communication with both workers and line management through regular direct contacts, in order to ensure that line managers do not wield unilateral powers and control over decision makings on work-related matters as well as to ensure that workers are empowered and co-



operation prevails between the two parties. To further enhance this, the current training offered to line managers would have to be improved and expanded to ensure that they are fully and adequately equipped with the relevant people management skills.

### **7.3.2. Potential Constraints to Ubuntu/Botho Culture in the Workplace**

These opportunities could however be offset and undermined by some of the constraints which constitute major challenges. These constraints and challenges include the apparent lack of co-operation between top management and NUM (the biggest union organising black African shopfloor production workers) due to, amongst others, the perception held by NUM's members and leaders that management is not fully committed to equity. This perception is clearly in contrast with management's view that Cranco Metals has made headway towards achieving equity targets. These different views on equity question at Cranco Metals has in fact become the matter of dispute between NUM and management, and has generated tensions and conflicts, which are likely to continue to occur and further strain labour relations as well as hampering performance and productivity improvement efforts.

Language is also one of the major constraints facing Cranco Metals. As evidence shows, effective communication between white line managers and black workers was hampered by the inability of both groups to speak each other's language. On the one hand, white managers can only speak English and Afrikaans and, on the other, the majority of black workers, while speaking several indigenous African languages, do not however speak either Afrikaans or English. Those (i.e. black workers) who can, only do so limitedly, which is still not adequate for efficient communication. This has in fact led to social distance on the shopfloor, the escalation of racial perceptions and attitudes, more tensions and disputes, and growing mistrust. This, together with the unilateral practices, also resulted in the creation of an "us" and "them" scenario which makes team spirit and team work difficult to be realised. Production and work related matters could also not be efficiently addressed and resolved to ensure smoother production relations and production flow. While code-switching could be a solution to



this problem of communication due to language deficiencies, at least at the basic communication level, this would however still be difficult to achieve as white foremen, who constitute the majority of senior line managers, would not be able to do so due to inability to speak any of the African languages except for versions of the unpopular controversial *fanakalo*.

If one considers, as Boccock (1992) has pointed out, that language is a fundamental social practice that constitutes a vital part of culture and that is through it that meanings are produced and exchanged; then it would be fully appreciated just how much of major challenge it is to attempts and efforts to integrate the ubuntu/botho cultural practices in the South African workplaces. As was noted from the review in chapter four, the culture of ubuntu/botho is anchored in the indigenous African languages. Various expressions and proverbs have been illustrated as examples to show the virtues and meanings that they embody and how these serve as the source of influence on the day to day lives and interactions amongst Africans (see Nokaneng, 1985; Kamwangamalu, 1999; and Teffo, 1999).

It is not hard, nor would it be far-fetched to suggest, on the basis of this that, although Africans were divided over matters of strategy and approach, the high degree of unity displayed during the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle around the common *Ideal of Nationhood*, first articulated at the 1912 Bloemfontein Conference as the cornerstone vision for the struggle, was attributable to the influence of the ubuntu/botho cultural virtues and values that promote solidarity embodied mainly in similar kind of language expressions (see Ngubane, 1963 and 1979). This suggests that, for there to be a successful and effective integration of the ubuntu/botho culture in South African workplaces today, African languages would have to be accorded the necessary recognition by management within those workplaces. That is, these languages should no longer be used only by black Africans alone but also by other South Africans of non-African descent i.e. those classified as coloureds, Indians and whites.

The reviews in the preceding chapters also point to another potential constraint i.e. the social walls inherited from the apartheid policies of segregation and discrimination that continue to divide South Africans. The research on black workers has, over and

above highlighting the influence of ubuntu/botho values on these workers' lives and their strategies of survival and resistance, also revealed social distance between black workers, on the one hand, and white workers and white managers on the other. For instance, Gordon (1977)'s findings about two social worlds whereby black worlds knew both worlds while the white managers knew and constituted only part of the public world and not the private world; and the findings of Moodie (1994) and Sitas (1996) concerning the system of *indunas* created by white management in attempt to reduce the distance.

Also shedding light on such racial social distance are the findings by Moodie (1994:13) of a pidgin language invented in the mines known as *fanakalo* used to issue instructions and orders to black workers while ensuring that relationships between blacks and whites are limited and impersonal. Kamwangamalu's (1999) argument that the current strategies used to promote it such as published literature, training manuals, workshops and seminars as well as conferences are grossly limited and inadequate, as ubuntu/botho culture is not a business concept but a social concept, is thus further supported by this empirical evidence of the reality of the apartheid-created social walls. These strategies are quick-fix in nature. I call them, using the analogy of a Bible, the *biblisiation* strategies as they rely solely on preaching ubuntu/botho values and its principles to both workers and managements.

Another potential constraint closely linked to language is what has been identified as evidence of negative impact of the past apartheid and colonial system on the indigenous African cultural values that, signalling a threat of gradual erosion and weakening of the latter. Note here, for instance, van den Berghe (1961), whose research has led him to argue that, within the small African community that he studied (i.e. the Caneville in today's KwaZulu-Natal), while some black Africans continued to practice and use their culture, others displayed cultural shame. Similarly, and recently Memela (2003) noted that some of the new emerging black middle are showing signs of abandoning the spirit and values of the ubuntu/botho culture due to growing selfish individualism and obsession with material success (these are the opposite of communalism or the idea that *I am because you are, you are because we are*).

The implications here are that if this trend continues to occur, especially in all sectors of the black African communities, it would seriously undermine any future attempts to implement and promote the virtues and values of ubuntu/botho within the business sphere and the workplace. This is particularly so as evidence from the reviews of both theoretical perspectives in chapter one and East Asian experiences suggests that, on its own and without active identification with it and living of its values by people as cultural agents, culture cannot have a significant influence on their lives and interactions. Hence for such influence to occur there is a need for a dynamic relationship between culture and the agents. A good testimony to this is the experiences of the East Asian countries whereby Confucianism's influence within the economic spheres i.e. both in the workplace and business strategies, was strengthened by the fact that this value system was entrenched and actively upheld at the family level. Hence Hahm (1999)'s assertion that under Confucianism, a family is not a repository but a training ground for public responsibility.

The tendency to manipulate and abuse cultural values by those in authority positions also presents a challenge that could manifest itself as a constraint. Ching (1997)'s study of both the Chinese factories and their workplace practices in Shenzhen and Hong Kong found that managements in factories manipulated the culturally and socially constructed gendered identities of their female workforce to legitimise their relegation to low-ranked unskilled, low-paying jobs; non-promotion; as well as to enhance managerial control and authority. They also exploited *guanxi* networks and gift economy practices to get lenient treatment from labour bureaus responsible for taxation and labour market regulations. This helped to ensure that there are no any explicit laws for regulation and therefore enhanced exploitation of the workers, while enhancing profitability for business organisations.

Similarly, in South Africa, strong evidence points to historical abuses of culture by politicians and managements that were associated with the apartheid system. For instance, both Mdluli and the Culture and Working Life Project staff activists published articles in which they exposed the abuses and manipulation of the Zulu identity and tradition as well as the ubuntu/botho culture by the apartheid-created KwaZulu homeland government led by the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) for spreading the "false ideology" of the IFP and apartheid separate development or divide and rule

policies as well as misrepresenting the Zulu traditions and legitimising male domination. This form of abuse at the political level found its way into the workplace and business sphere as was noted from Sitas(1997)'s concept of 'colonial managerialism' and from evidence presented by Moodie (1994) and Von Holdt (2003) on the system of control effected through black *indunas* in the South African mining sector.

The findings of this study at Cranco Metals suggest that culture continues to be used within the industrial and business sphere by managements in attempts to pacify and co-opt workers as well as to legitimise and obscure the reality of exploitation without significant benefits for workers. This can be particularly noticed from the workers' complaints about ill treatment by line managers and being kept in the same grade for years without any mobility, implying that wage levels do not improve in any significant way. It could also be noticed from Cranco Metals' promotion of PEC with its supposedly benign values and yet simultaneously planning to cut costs in the form of retrenchments and lay-offs through the Business Enhancement Programme or *Sebenza* Programme. Burgemeister (2004) also found that at First National Bank (FNB), one of the South African big corporations that he surveyed and which claims to have incorporated ubuntu/botho culture, had introduced a culture change and transformation process through the project called *Vuka* following a major loss of clients and market share. The project, aimed at increasing client base, higher product utilization, and increased customer and staff satisfaction as well as confronting hidden racist attitudes and practices; was according to Burgemeister, reported to have made significant achievements in these areas. Amongst some of the practices that were introduced is the notion of *umhlangano* (community gathering) whereby staff sit on the floor in circles and make collective decisions. Notwithstanding this however, Burgemeister found the project ironical as it occurred at the expense of workers who lost their jobs. As he puts it:

"Much less Ubuntu-like can be considered the bitter connotation of 2000 lost jobs, a fact that is rather in the tradition of western rationalisation as one of the most effective methods of increasing productivity"( Burgemeister, 2004: 55).

These findings lend support to Thrift (1999)'s assertion that along with the development of soft capitalism and cultural turn, part of which is the 'new' managerial discourse, occurs the 'hard edge of soft capitalism' with some serious consequences. One such consequence, he argues, is at the material level and manifests itself through "pain, heartbreak, and shattered lives". Hence that:

"Business organisations that take the managerialist discourse on board often become involved in programmes of direct 'downsizing', cutting back on the workforce with all the human misery this brings... Business organisations have also been involved in considerable indirect 'downsizing', for example, through programmes that lay off significant numbers of subcontractors so as to produce a core network of closely allied firms. Then, not to be taken lightly, organizational change has brought with it other forms of stress and strain, from the 50 year old executive who is being shunted into a part-time consultancy to the new graduate who must downsize their expectations of a corporate career. In other words, this new form of the exercise of corporate power is not necessarily any 'nicer' than what has gone before; for all the caring rhetoric, lean can just as easily be mean, and learning can mean stomach-churning. The sword of management is, always two-edged: economic success is, now as then, brought at the cost of the workforce, as much as to its benefit" (Thrift, 1999: 156).

Another consequence though would be that of mistrust and dissatisfaction that could lead to resistance from workers using symbolic resources to assert own identities and/or as a means of survival. As Thompson and Findlay (1999) have pointed out, workers constitute an active agency that is fully aware of management motives and of the rhetoric-reality gap. Thus, where efforts are being made to integrate the ubuntu/botho values into the workplace and other spheres of business economic activities, the parties or all actors involved would need to not only develop and demonstrate a high level of awareness and understanding of what the ubuntu/botho culture entails, but also be determined to live its values in their daily interactions. Furthermore, and in the light of the experiences that indicate the tendencies by managements to use culture to pacify workers while pursuing profits at their expense, I would uphold Maller's (1992) argument made in her analysis of workers' participation schemes that workers should always have an independent representative force and voice such as trade union. The role of the union here would be to serve as a watchdog against any abuses by the management or employers, thus helping to ensure that the ubuntu/botho induced culture benefits both employers and employees.

#### 7.4. What can be done? Proposed Measures to Overcome Constraints

I have argued that the current global hegemonic system of neo-liberal, nakedly exploitative capitalism system is not conducive to the harnessing and constructive integration of the ubuntu/botho values in the workplace. It requires fundamental transformation into the progressive form of economic system that does not seek to thrive on the misery and naked exploitation of workers and the poor. If that system is capitalist in outlook, it should preferably be what is often referred to as *capitalism with a human face*. This is feasible since the ubuntu/botho cultural virtues and principles are not anti-profit making or anti-wealth accumulation. What they discourage though is the desire to accumulate for the benefit of elite minority to the exclusion of the large masses of people. Such alternative system should be modelled on African indigenous modes of accumulation.

Omotoso (1996) has provided an outline of two examples of such ubuntu/botho-based African indigenous modes of capital accumulation. The examples Omotoso covered are the *esusu* amongst the Yoruba in Nigeria and *stokvels* or *mgalelo* (also known as *mogodisano*) amongst black South Africans. The *esusu*, he argues, was practised traditionally amongst the Yoruba people in order to enhance productivity, efficiency and performance. For instance, where a household does not have enough labour input or hands to perform tasks such as harvesting on a farm or building a house, peers or other community members such as neighbours would be invited to come and help, thus helping to raise the labour input. In return, the household would feed them and take care of them until the job has been completed (see Omotoso, 1996:167). In South Africa, especially in the countryside, this system or practice is known as *letsema* (in Sotho). This traditional system or practice of accumulation, Omotoso argues, has been carried into today's modern world by, for instance, the film-making industry in Nigeria made up of one hundred and fifty travelling theatres. To cut costs in their film-making operations, these theatre companies went back to the system of *esusu* and decided to co-operate with each other by inviting as many as possible and encamp in the film village and share out the roles and resources. This, Omotoso argues, has enabled the film industry to produce enough films to meet the needs of their ever-increasing audiences.



*Stokvels/mgalelo/mogodisano*, Omotoso argues, involve collection of specific agreed amounts of money from amongst its members and that money is given to one member in accordance with the pre-arranged order of benefiting from the collected funds. The collected funds, he argues, are not only restricted to benefiting individual members through cash payouts, but also have humanitarian and insurance aspect. During apartheid, for instance, he argues:

“Black women began to use the *stokvels* as a means of protection against police harassment. When a *stokvel* member was arrested, the others would help with the home and children until the member came out of jail. In this way, *stokvels* became more than just organisations for the circulation of money, and evolved into comprehensive support systems for members in times of hardship...Some *stokvels* have also evolved into burial societies, thus fulfilling an insurance function.” (Omotoso, 1996:168)

Omotoso however warns that when *stokvels* start to lay too much emphasis on money and differential interest, the vital *esusu* aspect is lost. Hence that “if an acceptable face of capitalism is to be seen in Africa, some form of humane *esusu* must be incorporated into the rigid system of capital accumulation and capital dispensation.” (Omotoso, 1996:169)

Such economic systems ensure that no artificial distinctions and divisions are drawn between the ‘politics of recognition’ and the ‘politics of redistribution’, but that they are fairly balanced and merged to achieve mutually enriching benefits and avoid the dangers associated with such artificial distinctions (see Fraser, 1999). This is not very different from the argument by Macun (1995) that *dynamic efficiency* strategy which, unlike the “low road” and the “high road” strategies that respectively emphasise the need for labour market flexibility (i.e. labour costs reductions) and union-employer co-operation which could marginalise the unorganised workers and entrench inequalities, would ensure that pursuit of profits and productivity is balanced with socio-economic equity and job security for workers. This, Macun argues, would help in unleashing effort from amongst workers for improvement of work performance.

Another area intervention, long-term in nature, is in the field of education and language. Such interventions would need to be at the societal level and be driven by government through the vigorous restructuring within the educational sector, and in



particular at the school level. Particular attention needs to be paid to the school curriculum. There would be a need for all South African schools to offer learners a wide range of language subject options and choices. Schools that only offer English and Afrikaans language subjects, which is more common with historically non-black African schools (i.e. the former white-only, Indian-only and coloured-only schools would need to include within their curriculum more than one African indigenous language subjects). This would not only lay a foundation for genuine future linguistic and cultural diversity, but would also help in moving beyond the legacy of the past whereby only black African schools in both urban townships and rural villages offered not only English and Afrikaans subjects but also indigenous African language subjects.

Also for consideration, would be to address another inherited legacy whereby in black African schools, geographical area tended to be the determinant of the indigenous African languages being taught in those schools. For instance, schools in the Eastern Cape region only offer isiXhosa and both Afrikaans and English language subjects, and no other indigenous African language such as Setswana or Xitsonga. Similarly, schools in KwaZulu-Natal would be offering English, Afrikaans and isiZulu, and no any other African language such as Siswati or Sesotho. It is should however be recognised that the democratic South African government has begun to take some initial steps towards addressing this situation inherited from the past. This it has done through the establishment of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) as a statutory body tasked with promoting multilingualism in South Africa through fostering of development of all the spoken languages in the country. PanSALB's main activity is on advocacy around linguistic human rights such as the right of citizens to be served in their own language by government institutions. It has also focused its energies on policy development around language use in government and higher education institutions (refer to the PanSALB website at [http://www.southafrica.info/ess\\_info/sa\\_glance/constitution/pansalb.htm](http://www.southafrica.info/ess_info/sa_glance/constitution/pansalb.htm)).

Although the measures taken by the government are still at nascent stages, it is however encouraging that the current National Minister of Education in SA, Naledi Pandor, announced during her parliamentary budget speech that the revised school

curriculum is aimed at elevating indigenous African languages to the same status as English and Afrikaans in schools. Note here some of her remarks:

“We need to develop a language policy that vigorously promotes South African indigenous languages in all schools... While competence in English was important, language could not be used as a ‘tool of exclusion’ ... Language in education cannot be seen solely as being about English or Afrikaans”

(See [http://www.southafrica.info/ess\\_info/sa\\_glance/constitution/pansalb.htm](http://www.southafrica.info/ess_info/sa_glance/constitution/pansalb.htm)).

Should the above interventions be successfully and fully implemented, it would go some way towards bridging the language divide in SA and promoting linguistic and cultural diversity. It would help to address a concern raised by Kamwangamalu(1999) that ubuntu/botho culture, far from being considered as a business concept or what Teffo (1999) call “a theory of business co-operation”, is a social concept. Hence this imposes serious constraints upon any attempts to transfer it into the business sphere. Such interventions would also contribute towards the breaking of the ‘social walls’ that Kamwangamalu (1999) argues have been erected by the apartheid policies which could block efforts for integration of ubuntu/botho in the workplace.

# **Chapter Eight**

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

## **8.1. Summary of Conclusions**

This study sought to examine the role that the indigenous African culture of ubuntu/botho could play in the socio-economic development of the contemporary post-apartheid democratic South African society. Specific attention was given to the role that the ubuntu/botho culture and its values and principles could play within the workplace, especially in the enhancement of work performance and stable working relations, where conflict becomes less endemic. My main task in the study was first to establish, at both theoretical and empirical levels, whether or not a case exists and/or can be established that points to the need for the ubuntu/botho culture to have a role. From this premise I proceeded to examine the objective conditions, if any, under which such a role could be realised. Below is a summary of the key concluding arguments and some recommendations for policy interventions and areas for further research.

### **8.1.1.**

I have argued, on the basis of the findings from reviews in chapters one to four and the case study findings of Cranco Metals Pty Ltd, that there are strong grounds for supporting the current claims that the ubuntu/botho culture's values and principles can be strategically and innovatively harnessed into a transformative and developmental force, especially in the economic sphere i.e. in business and workplace management. It follows that the findings present a strong case for ubuntu/botho culture. At the theoretical level, it was established that not only is culture an autonomous force but also that it has an influence on the socio-economic life of society e.g. shaping and influencing human behaviour and action, and thus effecting change and development.

However its influence depends by and large on the active role of people as cultural agents who need not only know and identify with cultural values, but also to act on and live those values in their day-to-day interactions. But it was further noted that people as active cultural agents could either act on and live the existing values, or develop them further or even create new ones. Linked to this is the view that culture's influence could vary. It could be divisive retarding progressive change and development, and thereby contribute to existing divisions and conflicts. Alternatively,

it could enhance greater social cohesion for positive change and development. Either way, culture is autonomous and has influence on human life and/or could be influenced and developed by people as cultural agents.

### **8.1.2.**

Experiences of the East Asian countries support the case for and claim about the ubuntu/botho culture's potential role in SA's socio-economic development. Those experiences show that the predominant Confucian culture, which embodies values with economically relevant propensities such as to co-operate and accumulate, along with or in combination with other factors like government policies that have provided privileged access to investment capital at low interest rates and export subsidies (see Pinkstone, 2000), played a vital role in the region's economic development. It was noted that the Confucian culture had and continues to have a positive influence on trans-border business relations and investment strategise amongst the Singaporean-Chinese. This was evidenced by the system of 'net-work capitalism' characterised by family-based hierarchical relationships and *guanxi*. It also has influence over production and workplace relations between workers and management that promotes greater co-operation and stability which in turn impacts positively on work performance (see Kwan Lee, 1997 and Dahles, 2004).

### **8.1.3.**

Further strengthening of the case for ubuntu/botho culture and claims made about its developmental capacity is the evidence that arose from the reviews on traditional and indigenous cultures and thought systems in Africa and their relevance to progressive change and development, especially in areas of science, technology and economy. It should be acknowledged that African countries are indeed lagging behind in the area of scientific development when compared to the Western nations. However, the view that the traditional and indigenous African thought systems and cultures are regressive and inimical to progress and development are challenged. This view was disputed on the grounds that:

- African cultures and thought systems, like those of other nations in the world, have within them both traditional and irrational values and beliefs and modern and

rational values and beliefs which could either inhibit or enhance societal development and progress. Hence the traditional and the irrational are not inherently and peculiarly African

- There is strong historical evidence which points to (and contrary to the above view) technological discoveries and achievements in Africa as well as rational thinking that informed the approaches used by African people.
- Progress and development and the achieved successes in Africa have been undermined by the centuries of colonial disruption
- African cultures and traditions are not static but are dynamic and adaptable to change. This disputes tendencies such as Tempel's that the real authentic Bantu tradition is that which has not departed from its original source, purity and innocence, is misleading and constitutes regret at the disappearance of the past.

This critique, together with the creolist perspective, discredits similar negative attitudes as shown by Weber towards cultures of other parts of the world outside of Western Europe.

#### **8.1.4.**

I have argued that the recent upsurge in debates, literature and research on ubuntu/botho culture and its role in the economy should be understood as part of the cultural turn trend in SA. Its first signs occurred in the 1970s in what Sitas (1997) terms the "new labour" studies and orientation in Sociology. This trend, which continued to grow to the present period, confirms the view that although both culture and economy are mutually autonomous, they nevertheless are mutually influential. I thus argue that the workplace, as the "new labour" studies revealed, is not only an economic sphere but also socio-cultural sphere. This reinforces Ching's (1997) argument that, contrary to Burawoy's narrow presentation of the workplace regime, the workplace regime has a cultural logic to it.

This cultural turn led to research which, while not necessarily concerned with the question of ubuntu/botho culture, brought to light evidence that revealed the influence of ubuntu/botho values within the workplace, and in particular on the lives, attitudes and actions of black workers. Hence the use of concepts such as "brotherhood" and

“cultural formations” to describe black workers class cultures in which ubuntu/botho values and principles were evident, playing a pivotal role in workers’ collective activities and actions for both survival and resistance to exploitation and oppression. This unifying role of the ubuntu/botho cultural values and principles, which enhanced the collective struggle by black workers around common held objectives, is not any different from that in which the same values and principles played in the preceding political struggles against colonialism and apartheid. This remained so despite differences amongst black-led liberation organisations on the appropriate approach and strategy. As Ngubane (1963 and 1979) has pointed out, the ubuntu/botho culture promoted unity around the *Ideal of Common Nationhood or Collective Will*.

It was noted that the ubuntu/botho culture has survived the destruction of its institutional basis under the colonial and apartheid policies, showing resilience, and that it continues to be influential on the lives of African people. This further adds weight to the case for its economic and developmental relevance today. At Cranco Metals, black African workers continued harness the ubuntu/botho spirit and values to guide and shape their solidarity in order to cope with strenuous work processes as well as to alleviate this through mutual assistance.

#### **8.1.5.**

Closely linked to the above argument and further strengthening the case for ubuntu/botho is the evidence that points to the historical failure on the part of predominantly white managements and employers in SA to successfully secure the full co-operation of black workers around production matters through participatory schemes informed by and modelled on Western humanistic notions. This becomes even more so in the light of the post-apartheid management-led labour market restructuring processes whereby the main concern is costs reduction. This has led to casualisation and flexibilisation of work, with the effect of undermining job security for workers by creating precarious forms of employment. The result has been the failure to seize the opportunities presented by the new democratic dispensation, especially the black workers’ shift in approach from the culture of resistance towards a culture of productivity. Labour market restructuring has led to a retreat on the part



of workers to the familiar turf of adversarialism, suspicion and mistrust. The management strategies are part of the dominant global neo-liberal capitalist system.

#### **8.1.6.**

Notwithstanding the strongly established case for the ubuntu/botho culture, some serious concerns were however raised about potential obstacles and constraints which could inhibit the ability to harness this culture into a transformative, developmental and productive force. Amongst those constraints is the tendency of abuse and manipulation of cultural values to legitimise subordination, exploitation and oppression. Such manipulative practices were evident from the findings of studies conducted both in South Africa and East Asian countries. In SA, this saw black workers reacting to such manipulations by harnessing the ubuntu/botho values to strengthen and enhance collective resistance. The result has been intensified adversarialism, undermining efforts to promote co-operative, stable employment relations as well as aggravating apartheid-inherited racial divisions in the workplace. This inherited legacy of the deeply adversarialism and racial and socio-cultural divisions is also a constraint. It represents the social walls that, for Kamwangamalu (1999), are barrier to a genuine integration of the ubuntu/botho cultural values and virtues into the workplace and business sphere.

#### **8.1.7.**

I have also argued that the evident historical and continued presence of the ubuntu/botho cultural values and virtues in South African workplaces, harnessed by workers and managements to achieve conflicting goals, presents a serious challenge to the claim by Kamwangamalu that the ubuntu/botho culture has been eroded by the apartheid system and policies. This also challenges his rather pessimistic claim that ubuntu/botho culture “is an ideal whose virtues are perhaps too numerous and of a too high standard for any human being or community ... to conform to them at all.” (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 37) Notwithstanding this, care should however be taken not to underestimate some research reports which point to signs of *cultural shame* on the part of some black Africans, especially within the middle class and youth categories (see van den Berghe, 1961; Nzimande, 1988; and Memela, 2003).

## **8.2. General, Policy and Further Research Recommendations**

### **8.2.1.**

To overcome the legacy of racial divisions and social distance, it is necessary to resolve the issue of language, especially as Boccock (1992) has pointed out, it is a socio-cultural practice. Addressing it would help in enhancing not only the full realisation of the potential presented by cultural diversity but also would contribute towards overcoming those social walls and divisions as well as the divisive 'us' and 'them' perceptions. It would in the long run help in eliminating this inherited legacy and open up a space for a genuine integration of cultures helping to overcome. It would help to address the concern raised by Kamwangamalu(1999) that ubuntu/botho culture, far from being considered as a business concept or what Teffo (1999) calls "a theory of business co-operation", is in fact a social concept. Hence, this imposes serious constraints upon any attempts to transfer it into the business sphere. As I have pointed out, the government's initiative through PanSALB and commitment to promoting all the languages, especially the historically marginalised African languages, should be seen as a welcome gesture that may in the long run bring sustainable solution. Although it is a bit early, further research in this area may be necessary for the purpose of assessing progress and future prospects.

### **8.2.2.**

Given the manipulative tendency on the part of those in authority positions such as managements to abuse culture furtherance of sectarian interests, and to foster genuine co-operation along the principles of botho/ubuntu in the workplace, workers would need to maintain their independent collective strength through representative structures such as trade unions. I thus concur here with Maller's (1992) assertion that for workplace democracy to be enhanced with a view to promoting co-operation over issues of common interests between employers and workers the latter, with less access to power, would need to have an independent locus of power in the form of a trade union which should not only serve as a watchdog over management/employer's abuse of power or possible attempts to roll back workers' gains but also exert control over decision makings. This Maller (1992) argues is based not only on the recognition of unequal power relations between employers and workers, but also of the contradictory

dual nature of the labour process characterised by both conflict and co-operation. The importance of such independent power base in the form of a trade union which both guards workers' interests and ensure that employers do not manipulate workers has clearly been noticed from the case study of Cranco Metals. at Cranco Metals, the NUM as the majority trade union, fulfilled this functioned by cautioning its members and alerting them to the dangers associated with the top-down management initiated PEC strategy and *Sebenza* Project, through which management sought to cut labour costs (the planned retrenchments) yet simultaneously wanting to co-opt workers into co-operation in productivity and performance enhancing processes.

### **8.2.3.**

Claims about cultural shame on the part of black Africans justify further investigation to determine the extent to which this is real, the implications for claims about erosion of ubuntu cultural values, and also to propose solutions. This is important in the light of the theoretical perspective that culture's significance and relevance to life is dependent on people as active agents identifying with and living its on a day to day basis.

### **8.2.4.**

The current hegemonic system of neo-liberal capitalism, which thrives on naked exploitation of workers and is incompatible with the person-oriented values and principles of the culture of ubuntu/botho, needs to be transformed. Only a humane system could be compatible with the ubuntu/botho values. It has been shown that in Africa, examples of such alternative system are *stokvels* and *isusu*. This is however an area that needs not only further debate but also more research.

### **8.2.5.**

Perhaps also needing further research, especially in the light of my above recommendation and proposed solution (i.e. in 8.2.4.) as well as the claims about cultural and eroded ubuntu culture, are the black African owned and controlled enterprises. Here I am particularly thinking of the industrial enterprises which have benefited from the government's Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and Equity

policies as measures of redress of the apartheid racial injustices and disparities. Such policies and initiatives were also justified on the basis of the need seize and make a full use of the opportunities presented by the country's social and cultural diversity, by bringing black African people and other historically marginalised sectors of the society into the mainstream economy. Questions that may be explored in such research may include: do black owned and managed companies have different practices and values from the historically white owned and managed ones, or are they all operating in similar ways informed by neo-liberal capitalist imperatives? I have mentioned earlier on in the preceding chapter that Telkom, a government-owned and black managed corporation, has shown similar tendencies as other white owned and controlled enterprises. The question though is, to what extent or how widespread is this situation? Does it apply to all other government-owned or black owned and managed companies? More other research may also need to be done on all other South African companies and their workplaces in order to examine their practices and organisational cultures as well as working relations, and their implications for the integration of and fusion with the ubuntu/botho values.

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# Appendix 1

## Methodology and Methods Used

Cranco Metals Ltd is a South African base metal production and processing factory located approximately sixty kilometres outside of Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province of SA. The study or field work at Cranco Metals was conducted over a period of three months between September and December 2003. The study kicked off following a successful meeting with the factory's top management held on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2003 at 2h00 in which I made a formal request for access to conduct a research in the factory. Shortly before starting with the actual research, I attended two occupational, health, safety and environmental induction training sessions. One was conducted by both the factory personnel and a private consultancy in order to comply with and meet the mining and metal sectors' safety requirements.

The study's main objective was to examine the relevance of and the role that the African culture of ubuntu/botho could play in the enhancement of work performance and participation in the workplace under the condition of the post-apartheid democracy and intense economic competition presented by globalisation and economic neo-liberalism. In so doing, an attempt will be made not only to examine and determine the role, if any, that the ubuntu cultural values could play in enhancing workplace participation and work performance, but also the conditions under which that role could best be fulfilled.

The research methods used during field work at Cranco Metals for both collection and analysis of data were mainly qualitative, using in-depth interviews based on semi-structured questionnaires. At the factory floor, relations between production workers and line management were investigated. This was done through in-depth interviews with both shopfloor production workers and management (both senior and junior or line management levels) using semi-structured questionnaire. In addition to several other

smaller units that constitute Cranco Metals factory, there are seven large main production plants. It is from these seven production plants that I drew the sample for this study, following five days of orientation to the factory and all its plants by the Communications Manager. This gave me the opportunity to familiarise myself with the factory's layout and the production process, to be introduced to workers on duty and their shopfloor representatives and line managers, as well as to brief them about my study and its objectives. This turned out to be a really helpful exercise in terms of enhancing co-operation from the workforce and line management in my study. What made this even much easier was the Communication Manager (a black African male)'s incredible fluency in all of the 11 South African official languages (i.e. to be precise Tsonga, Venda, Pedi/Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa, English, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Swati, and Tswana).

Qualitative methods enable the researcher to study human behaviour and action from the perspective of the researched or social actors or insider, thus helping to develop a "thick" description or in-depth description and understanding of those actions and events. Here, the context in which events and actions occur, rather than attribution of some abstract theoretical assumptions, is taken into account, presenting possibilities for the development of new hypotheses and theories (Babbie and Mouton, 2004: 270). Similarly, Neuman (1994:321) argues that a qualitative case study researcher immerses him/herself in data helping her to develop intimate familiarity with people's lives and culture, their actions, and words within the context of the overall case as whole. Hence qualitative researchers "analyse specific events and or settings in order to gain insight into the larger dynamics of a society" (Neuman, 1994: 323).

Given the interlinked nature of the main production plants, whereby the production process starts in the first plant in which raw material first arrives to be prepared for subsequent processing in the other plants and ends in the last plant (the seventh in the row) where the final metal product ready for the market is produced, I decided to conduct interviews in all of the seven plants with the same number of production workers. Although the number of production workers varied depending on the number of workers

per shift and per plant as well as the labour intensity of in each plant, an average of 8 workers including team leaders and section leaders were interviewed per plant. Since all the workers were exposed to more or less similar working conditions and could capably carry out work anywhere in the plant (this is attributable to both the workers' multiple skills and deep knowledge of work due to long job tenure as well as the integrated nature of the plant), I decided to use random sampling technique to select for the interviews without worrying about the dangers of non-representativity. An advantage with this method of sampling is that it allows the researcher to select a smaller subset of cases from a larger pool of cases that is much more manageable and cost-effective to work with than using the entire pool of all cases, and still arrive at conclusions that permit safe generalisation (Neuman, 1994: 193-194).

All interviews were conducted during both morning and afternoon shifts and none during night shifts. The advantage though was that all permanent production workers and some casual workers interviewed have worked in the night shifts. Thus the workers were able to reflect on night shift experiences as well and the implications thereof for performance at work. Interviews were conducted in English, Northern Sotho, and Zulu languages. In most cases, code-switching was used between either of the two latter African indigenous languages and English language. Interviews with workers were aimed to establish their social and demographic profile such as their permanent homes; current or temporary places of stay while employed at Cranco Metals; employment tenure; age and education levels; language/s spoken; and marital status. They were also used to explore their attitudes, views and perceptions about shop-floor relations among themselves as workers and also between workers and management; their understanding of the company's organisational culture and its role and relevance to their lives; their understanding of management strategies for improvement of work performance and shop-floor relations; and their attitudes, perceptions and experiences of those strategies and organisational culture and its influence on shop-floor relations, work performance and productivity; as well as their views on African indigenous culture of ubuntu/botho and its workplace relevance or irrelevance.



Similar questions were investigated through interviews with management. Foremen for all the seven production plants were interviewed including where possible and available some supervisors (in total 2 supervisors were interviewed). Like the workers, foremen did work both day and night shifts before. It was vital to interview all the plants' foremen as they are the main line managers with supervisors falling under their authority as subordinates. Interviews with line management were also meant to generate an understanding of the nature of their work they perform, how they perceive it and their views on challenges and opportunities to enhancement of work performance and productivity.

Interviews with foremen and supervisors also aimed to establish an understanding of the production processes, their employment tenure and background before assuming their current managerial functions, their approach to workers' grievance and resolution thereof as well as their views on the company's value system. More or less similar issues were explored through interviews with senior management comprised of the production manager, the human resources manager, the communications manager, and the general manager.

Also interviewed were workers' representatives from all the three trade unions organising at Cranco Metals i.e. the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), a majority union whose membership is predominantly black production workers; the Mine Workers Union Solidarity (MWU) with a predominantly white production workers as members; and the United Association of South Africa (UASA), with white-collar membership. A representative from each of these unions was interviewed. A representative from each of these unions was interviewed.

In total, 60 production workers (approximately 10 percent of the workforce sample out of a total workforce just over 800 workers including casual workers), 6 foremen, 2 supervisors, 4 middle and senior managers (i.e. a production manager, human resources manager, communications manager, and the general manager) were interviewed. This made a total of 72 in-depth interviews (see appendix 2 for list of interviews conducted).

**NB.** Due to confidentiality and anonymity reasons, I refrained from using the correct names of the plants and thus just labelled them alphabetically as plants A to G. For similar reasons I also have not mentioned the names of the interviewees but only identified them in terms of their occupational level and/or position within the company as well as trade union and/or workers' association affiliations (For Samples of questionnaires used for interviews, see appendix 3). As Neuman (2000: 99) pointed out, anonymity means that the research subjects remain nameless with the researcher providing "a social picture of a particular individual, but gives a fictitious name and location" altering some characteristics and using a code number to refer to subjects. Neuman (2000) however points to a danger presented by the observing of anonymity as lying in the fact that it creates a gap "between what was studied and what is reported to others", thus making people to question what was actually found and what was made up. This is yet another ethical dilemma.

Other complementary methods were also employed for data gathering. They included observations as non-participant or simple observation both at the shopfloor level during production process and also in meetings on safety and health programmes and social investment programmes. Advantages of this approach lies in the fact that it can be done anywhere, and in "the presence of an observing, thinking researcher on the scene of the action" (Babbie and Mouton, 2004:294). I also analysed some of the company's relevant documents such as those containing factory's records of productivity and performance levels, those with information on grading systems and wages, safety regulations, and newsletters. These helped to both shed light on Cranco Metals and its parent company's policies and also to examine the extent to which Cranco Metals has adopted and lived those policy positions. My use of complementary methods for data collection is consistent with what Babbie and Mouton (2004:282) call multiple sources of data commonly used in case studies. The rational behind this approach, they argue, is based on the idea of replication which helps to increase the researcher's confidence on the reliability of the findings.

This should not however be confused with ‘positivistic triangulation’ approach which has been proven to have serious limitations. While the latter approach also combines different methods, theories, sources and materials; it however demonstrates serious limitations. Its main limitation lies in the fact that such combination is meant to capture and present “a more accurate or truthful picture of the social world” and hence striving to be true to lived realities of people (Saukko, 2003: 23). Saukko finds this approach problematic since the key objective of combining methods, rather than being to establish and present so-called true lived experiences and realities, is in fact to problematise such simple notions of reality or truth. This, he argues, is particular so since “reality does not hold still, but is amoeba-like, multifaceted, evolving, looking different from different angles (from the perspectives of the young girls, village elders, colonial archives etc.) [Ibid, 2003: 24]. Furthermore, he argues that another limitation of positivistic triangulation approach is that it presents research as a technical rather than as a social activity with political agenda i.e. aiming to bring about change and transformation within society.

While Saukko finds the alternative approach advocated by Richardson (2000) known as “crystallisation” to be coming much closer to enabling a good grasp of the complex nature of social reality than the positivistic triangulation approach, he however also identified some inherent weaknesses in it. In terms of this approach, he argues, research is like a “prism” and reality is fluid, with research serving to create or socially construct different realities. Saukko thus argues:

“Rather than view research as describing a reality from the outside, this perspective locates research within reality, as one of the processes that ‘make’ realities. Often, the prismatic vision of research is committed to projects that bring to the fore multiple perspectives on reality, or multiple realities, with the specific aim of challenging the old idea that there is one privileged way of looking at reality, or one reality.” (Saukko, 2003: 26)

Notwithstanding the strengths of this approach, Saukko finds its main weakness lying in its failure to acknowledge what he calls “contextual validity”, especially in the light of the reality of pervasive “global structures” everywhere in the world which bind different realities and experiences together. Hence it is not suited to the analysis of the nature of

the impact of global economic developments. This makes it difficult to envisage and develop joint political and policy solutions for the transformation of those structures (Saukko, 2003: 27).

Having identified the weaknesses in both the positivistic triangulation and “crystallisation” approaches, Saukko proposes a middle ground for reconciling the two approaches. He finds this middle ground in Haraway (1988 and 1997)’s approach known as “diffraction” or “material-semiotic” perspective which emphasises not just refracting of reality but also moving away from it. As he points out, diffraction “...refers not simply to a symbolic or social construction of reality – or to ‘creating worlds with words’ ... but it understands research as a force that alters or creates reality in both symbolic and material terms” (Saukko, 2003: 27). Hence material-semiotic perspectives or diffraction “acknowledges that research is always facilitated and constrained by the existing social and material environment and it needs to understand ... structures of social inequality or the basis of ecological reality, if it is going to change them” (Saukko, 2003: 28).

In chapter 7, I provide a critical and comprehensive analysis of the findings overall main findings of the study. It is in this chapter that the case study findings at Cranco Metals are critically analysed within the context of findings and analysis made in the preceding chapters on theory, East Asian experiences, perspectives on African indigenous cultures and thought systems, as well as from the review of ubuntu/botho culture debate and realities in SA, both in the past and today. So, essentially what chapter 7 does is that it develops a core argument of the study through a synthesis and weaving together of various arguments and analyses made throughout the study. This lays the basis for the subsequent chapter 8 whereby some key concluding remarks, observations and assertions are finally made.

## Appendix 2

### Questionnaire Guiding Interviews with Production Workers.

#### Demographic Information & Workers' Profile:

Tick the appropriate box:

- ☐ male
- ☐ female
- ☐ age
- ☐ race
- ☐ marital status

- What is your permanent home?
- How often do you go home? Do you think it is important to go home & Why?
- Where do you intend to settle permanently after retirement? Please explain why?
- Where do you currently stay?
- What is your home/mother language/tongue?
- What other languages do you speak or are you able to speak?
- Is it important to know or be able to speak other/different languages?
- If yes, please explain why?
- If no, please explain why?
- How do you get to work everyday?

**On educational status of the workers:**

Tick the appropriate box.

- ☐ never been to school
- ☐ primary school level
- ☐ secondary school level
- ☐ matric level
- ☐ tertiary level: specify qualification held
- ☐ Currently studying. Specify what you are studying for.

**Workplace Experiences of the Workers:**

- When did you first join this company?
- How did you know about and come to join this company?
- How does it feel going to work everyday and working for your or this company?
- Have you experienced any changes in your work in the last five years?
- What are those changes, if any, and what do you think of them eg. Machinery, working organization, working relations and training.
- What work do you perform?
- Do you feel that you have control over the job that you are performing at work?
- Is there anyone supervising you at work? If yes, how do you feel about that?
- How would you describe relationships with your immediate line manager i.e. your supervisor and foreman?
- How would you describe relationships amongst workers themselves?
- What role do supervisors/ managers play here at work?
- Do you feel free to make suggestions to foremen/ supervisors on how productivity and performance can be improved? Are you keen to make such suggestions?
- Is there any specific language that you as workers are using to communicate between yourselves here at work? If yes, why this language?

- Are there any rules here in the workplaces that regulate workers' behavior? If any, how is your reaction to them?
- How do those rules impact on your lives as workers?
- Does the company offer workers any training? If it does, have you personally received training? What kind of training is it? Do you think that training is relevant and helpful to you and your work improvement? Explain how?
- Are performance and production levels in the company high or low?
- If low or high, what do you attribute that to?
- What does the management do to achieve high performance?
- Do you think that workers should always strive to improve their performance and production? Give reasons for your answer.
- If you do, what do you do to achieve high performance and production?
- Do you think that as workers you share common interests?
- Do you have any work teams/do you work in teams? Why is it vital to do so?
- Do you do one type of a job or different types of jobs?
- How did you learn to do those jobs?
- Do you think that the workers and management share common interests?

**On Ubuntu/Botho Culture:**

- Are you familiar with the idea of ubuntu/botho culture?
- If you are, how would you describe it or what does it entail?
- Do you believe in it or do you think it is a good value system and practice? Please explain why?
- Does it still exist in your community i.e. where you come from and where you currently stay or even in South Africa today?
- Would you consider your workplace as having practices and values of ubuntu/botho?



- Do you still practice ubuntu? What about the workers and management here at work?
- Do you think that ubuntu/botho is relevant here at work?

**I wish to thank you for your co-operation in sharing this information with me. Please note that this information will be treated with strictest confidentiality and that your name/s will not be divulged to anyone, except with your permission.**

# Appendix 3

## Questions Guiding Semi Structured Interview with the General Manager of Cranco Metals

- What is the market like in which Cranco Metals competes, and how would you describe the level of competition? Is Cranco Metals one of the key competitors in your sector?
- What in your view and experience are the key determining factors of performance and productivity?
- What productivity-related challenges and constraints are you facing as Cranco Metals?
- Has Cranco Metals adopted any strategy or (-ies) aimed at achieving high performance, productivity and overcoming challenges and constraints?
- What has been the effect of those strategies so far?
- Does Cranco Metals have Organisational Culture? How would you describe it? What inspired the development of that culture i.e. how was it originated? What are its main objectives and goals?
- Is the culture of Cranco Metals effective?
- Does Cranco Metals have any policy guidelines on promotion and equity? Any specified and set targets?
- On promoting people, say from section leader to a foreman, what criteria is considered? Is training provided to those promoted?

## Appendix 4

### Questionnaire for Interview with Human Resources (HR) Manager of Cranco Metals

- How would you describe your job? What in your view are the key Human Resources challenges facing your Department and Cranco Metals? What would you attribute them to?
- What have you done in the HR section to address those challenges? Any successes or constraints you encountered?
- What are the literacy and numeracy levels amongst your workforce?
- Do you provide any training to address the literacy and numeracy situation?
- Any other forms of training that you provide your staff and/or workforce?
- Would you please explain how the grading system and the corresponding wage/salary rates work here at Cranco Metals?
- Are there any specific criteria that you use for promotions, especially with respect to the line management positions?
- HIV/AIDS programme – how did it come about and how was the spitting campaign communicated to the workers?
- What are the implications of the Performance Enhancement Culture (PEC) for the HR section? Are you doing anything to uphold the values promoted by this culture and to enhance achievement of its set goals? Has it been effective? Any challenges?
- Is absenteeism a problem here at Cranco Metals? What is being done to address it?
- I heard of the industrial theatres taking place here at Cranco Metals. Where does the idea come from and what are its main objectives? Are they effective?
- What kinds of grievances, if any, are common in your plants and how do you resolve them?
- How would you describe the structure of workforce as well as management in terms of racial, gender and age breakdowns?

# Appendix 5

## Dates and Times of Interviews Conducted at Cranco Metals in October - December, 2003

### September:

Meeting with Senior Management for Access Request

### October:

#### PLANT A

8/10/2003 6 workers 9h00-12h30

10/10/2003 12h30-13h00 Supervisor

10/10/2003 Senior Metallurgist for Technical information regarding the factory  
13h30-14h30

22/10/2003 2 workers 10h30 – 12h00

#### PLANT B

29/10/2006 1 worker/part-time shopsteward 8h30 – 9h15  
1 worker 9h15 - 10h00

29/10/2003 A Shut Down for Safety Assessment - all plants

31/10/2003 10h00 with Communications Manager's meeting on Social Investment Programme

31/10/2003 7 workers from 11h50 till late afternoon

### November:

05/11/2003 Foreman 10h15

#### PLANTS C AND D

05/11/2006 2 workers 9h00 – 10h00  
5 workers 11h15 – 15h00

07/11/2006 6 workers (including a section leader also a production worker)

12/11/2003	5 workers 8h30 – 10h50
12/11/2003	Safety Committee Meeting 11h00
12/11/2003	General Manager's Meeting (attended by workers representatives and line managers) 15h00
14/11/2003	Foreman 9h20
14/11/2003	Foreman 10h15
<b><u>PLANT E</u></b>	
14/11/2006	8 workers 11h00-14h30
14/11/2006	Foreman 9h30-10h30
<b><u>PLANT F</u></b>	
19/11/2006	5 workers 9h30-12h30
19/11/2006	Foreman at 13h00
<b><u>PLANT G</u></b>	
19/11/2003	4 Workers 14h30 – 16h00
21/11/2003	4 workers 9am-11am
21/11/2003	Shift supervisor 11h15 – 12h00
21/11/2003	HR manager 12h30 – 13h30
<b>December</b>	
03/12/2003	4 workers 10h00 - 12h30
03/12/2006	Foreman 12h30 -13h30
11/12/2003	Production Manager 13h00-14h00
04/12/2003	Communication Manager 11h30 – 12h00
04/ 12/ 2003	General Manager 15h30 – 17h00